The Rooster with Golden Hair

Maurice Sand

1867

Translated into English from the pioneering French epic fantasy novel called *Le Cox Aux Cheveaux D'Or*

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A note on measurements: Two cubits = approximately 1 modern yard.

Prologue

Since I came to Trebizond to occupy the office with which the Emperor Valentinian has invested me, I have often been in communication with the priests and Magi of Armenia and Chaldea, worshippers of the sun. Although a Roman officer I have talked with them at length about their religion, their ancient civilization, and their history. One day, one of them, an old man, claimed, among other things, that his ancestors were descended from the Atlanteans. Hearing him name this fabulous people, and speak of the catastrophe which is said to have swallowed up Atlantis, I could not help stating that this island is known as a chimerical country, having never existed except in the minds of the poets.

The disciple of Zoroaster smiled, and recommended me to read, before denying the existence of Atlantis, the universal history of Diodorus Siculus, the Greek translation of the Phoenician Sanchoniaton, the Timaeus and Critias of Plato, Alexander Polyhistor, Ammianus Marcelinus, Avienus, and several other historiographers. After which he left me with a grave air, and I saw that my incredulity had hurt him. I read the authors whom he had recommended to me, and I recognized that I had been wrong to deny a fact so undeniable as the existence of a primitive people and a common focus of civilization.

I first learned that Seoseres, the same as Osiris and Bacchus, was a deity followed by an agglomeration of various peoples, among whom the Egyptians and Scythians predominated. After having subdued Asia, they founded colonies which became Atlantis. These were located at the foot of the Caucasus and on the banks of the Euxine Bridge, or Sea of the Blacks, so called from the Ethiopian race which then inhabited its shores, Some called it the country of the Antes, and the kingdom of Cos, later Colchis.

These ancient peoples, worshippers of the stars and the star-animals they saw in the constellations, chose them as symbols, in order to

recognize each other. Sometimes they also used the symbols to mark another out for wrath and vengeance.

The star-planets, by their brightness or importance, were the first to be chosen; hence these peoples were of the Sun and the Moon. Assimilation was not limited to the stars; an animal was, moreover, the attribute of each family, which bore the image of it painted or tattooed on the breast, forehead, or arms.

Thus it was that the Nubian of the far south, personified in Anubis, took for his emblem the jackal, who dwelt like him on the plains of sand. The Amazon wore the head of the lion who had fallen under her blows. The Scythians, riding horses nearly all their lives, were considered centaurs, and had the horse as their attribute. The heraldic signs which still appear today in the arms of our Roman Empire: the eagle, the boar, the leopard, the bear, the louye, the, etc., can have no other origin. King Seoseres, whose empire extended from Black Sea to Ceylon, and from the Nile to the Caucasus mountains, had overrun the nations of the black and red race. It followed that there was over time necessarily a mixture between the victors and the vanquished among the lower classes, the result was in certain places whole generations of half-breeds, mulattoes, Pelasgian browns, and even some white-haired negroes, who of course revolted against the benefactors who had brought them trade and learning, good buildings and laws. Only the white Egyptians and the blond Scythians remained pure breeds, and kept their old ways true.

It was in the midst of these struggles, sung afterwards by the half-remembering poets under the name of the war of the Titans and Olympians, that volcanic eruptions upset Atlantis and buried it partly under water. I will quote the passage from Plato:

"One day, Solon wanted to engage the priests of Sais to speak with them of antiquity; he began to relate to them what we know of the most ancient: Phoroneus, Niobe, the deluge of Deucalion, their posterity, calculating the number of years and trying to fix the time of events. One

of the older priests said to him, "O Solon, you Greeks will always be children; there are no old men among you. "And why is that?" said Solon. "You are all," said the priest, "young in intelligence; you possess no old tradition or science venerable by its antiquity. The reason for this is that mankind has suffered and will suffer many destructions, the greatest by fire and water, and the least by a thousand other causes. You Greeks speak of only one deluge, although there have been several before, and of the most beautiful and valiant race that ever existed, you do not mention it. Although you and all your countrymen have their origin in one of the families of that race which escaped the common disaster. You do not know all this because the survivors and their descendants remained for a long time without knowledge of the written letters... All that has happened in Egypt during the last eight thousand years is recorded in our sacred books and temple walls; but I can go back further and tell you what our fathers did nine thousand years ago... There was in front of the strait which you call the Pillars of Hercules an island of vast size, a veritable continent. In this island of Atlantis reigned kings of great and marvellous power; they had under their dominion the whole island, as well as several other islands and some parts of the larger continent. In the course of time, great earthquakes and floods swallowed up all the warriors in a single day and in one fatal night... Atlantis disappeared under the waters; therefore, since that time, the sea has become inaccessible and has ceased to be navigable there - by the quantity of silt that the damaged island has left settled over its resting place."

The tribes that escaped this disaster dispersed and transmitted the impression of it to their descendants. Hence, no doubt, this tradition of a deluge which ruined the earth; but the word land (*ghe*) had no other meaning than that of country.

The Hycsos, that is to say, the Scythians, landed on the shores of Egypt; the Chaldeans entered Babylonia, which they called the land of Ur, in memory of the southern part of the great sunken island. All of them preserved the diluvian legend: the Pelasgians, that of Ogyges the

northern part of Atlantis; the Hellenes, that of Deucalion; the Hebrews, that of Noah; the Celts, that of Dwylan.

As for assigning a date to this cataclysm, I do not know. My old fire-worshipper, who looks at me with less contempt since I listen to him with interest, has opened to me his Chaldean books, which pretend that the antediluvian kings reigned for four hundred and thirty-two thousand years.

This is perhaps rather an exaggeration. Be that as it may, there will still be enough time in the past of men for it to be affirmed that before ancient Memphis in Egypt, Nineveh, the lost cities that led up to great Babylon, Ilion, and Sicyon there existed many other opulent cities, now unknown or extinct. Such as Sisparis, the capital of Atlantis.

For ten years that I have been traversing the extreme east of the Roman Empire, that is to say, the Caucasus or Kaf mountains, Colchis or the country of Cos, the Tauric Chersonese, the banks of the Palus Meotis, the banks of the Hypanis and the Tanais. I am convinced that these countries were formerly part of Atlantis, whose capital and principal island are now swallowed up at the bottom of the vast sea of the Euxine Bridge. And that, consequently, the Pillars of Hercules of which Plato speaks, were not the rocks of Calpe and Abyla which separate Africa from Spain, but rather the stelae erected at the entrance to the Cimmerian Bosphorus by Seoseres.

I have collected enough fragments and legends relating to this ancient civilization to stitch together this fable, the heroes of which, afterwards, became gods among the peoples descended from the races that escaped the disaster.

Such as Satourann, who must be Saturn; Bolkai, who is none other than Vulcan; Thor, Hugadarn, deified among the Scythians and the Cimbres; Nemeith, the father of the Celtic race, etc. It is enough to tell you, O

reader, that this account of 'times that are no more' is prior to what we know of even the most ancient times.

CHAPTER I

"The earth was a confused and mobile mass lost in the impenetrable depths.

"The darkness was in the darkness. No air, no water, no sky. Nothing was visible or invisible. Everything was confused. There was no death, no immortality.

"And yet everything rested within this chaos.

"Where do beings come from? Who created the gods that men worship and fear?

"Who knows these things? Who can say them?

"The one who is everywhere, in everything, in the nothingness as in the inhabited. Who else would have this science?

"He consolidated the earth and fixed it on its foundation, bound the heavens, threw stardust into it, and sent his son Mithra-Sun, Mithra-Light, Mithras of ten thousand looks.

"Then everything appeared.

"The earth was formed of rock, fire, and water. Day separated from night; the rain fell, the grass took root, the flower blossomed, the bee buzzed, the bird cut through the air, the horse neighed, the tiger roared, and the man spoke. Ahura Mazda, the supreme justice, the supreme will, did all these things, and he did them for good.

"Man was first created weak, defenseless against the teeth of animals, without means of escaping from them by the speed of his legs, without fur and feathers to protect himself from the cold.

"Time brings with it its teaching. The fruit buds and flowers before ripening.

"In his wisdom, Ahura Mazda saw that man, the last to come to earth, was the worst divided. He breathed into her one of his rays of wit.

"The man tore up the rock and made a weapon of it. He struck the tiger with it, covered himself with his skin, tamed the horse, ate the honey of the bee, and cut down the plant for shelter.

"Ahura Mazda had created man for good; but the man found the evil.

"Angramanyu the ill-intentioned brought lies, treachery, violence, pride, envy and lust.

"This has been and will be until the day when man despises the fatal gifts of Angramanyu to listen only to Ahoura Mazda.

"Then good will be in evil, and sovereign justice alone will reign.

Thus spoke, from the top of the steps of the temple of Atanor, the high priestess of the fires of Ptah. Below him gaped the crowd in the immense square of Sisparis, capital of the land of the Antes. Ziris was the name of the priestess. Left alone of the fourteen children born of the marriage of Satourann, supreme king of vast Atlantis, and Queen Bahavani, she had been dedicated, from her birth, to the god Ptah, adored by the Atlanteans in the form of a spray of flames. These volcanic fires shone on the summit of the mountain Atanor, which raised its cone of black lava in the middle of the city. A high bronze wall, inlaid with shining stones, surrounded the crater. It was the sanctuary of the God, into which the high priestess alone had the right to enter. A second wall halfway up the hill formed an enclosure reserved for the Ziris, virgins consecrated to the worship of fire and charged with the guard of the temple situated at the foot of the volcano.

This temple, of massive construction, was surmounted by a gigantic idol, lying flat on its stomach on the roof. Its body, interlocking with green bronze plates, resembled the skin of a dragon. His crooked limbs disappeared in the details of the architecture, and his head, surmounted by four golden points, imitating flames, opened a large red mouth, provided with innumerable elephant tusks.

Standing on the last step of the basalt staircase, Ziris the daughter of Satourann spoke to the Atlanteans, who were ever eager for her teachings. The square and the streets were crowded up to the terraces of the houses which threatened to collapse under the mass of believers. The king, the queen, the court, the colleges of priests or mobeds, the

warriors stood on the steps. The silence was so profound, so solemn, that the shepherds of the Atlai mountains, an hour from the city, could hear the melodious voice of the priestess and the sound of the lyres with which Ziris accompanied her words. This is because she was not only the only legitimate daughter of the king and the greatest of the Temple-maidens , but also the bride of Ptah, the god of subterranean fires. This was an alliance which made her an almost divinity and the most powerful mortal in the known world.

To speak to her standing was an insult, to question her a crime, and to touch her a sacrilege that deserved death: in a word, she was Ziris.

She was then sixteen years old; descended from the race of the Dives, she had the whiteness and elegant stature of the Dives. His waist was straight as a spear from the land of Havila. Her bosom raised her Cos veils, and her supple hips undulated her light draperies. His face resembled the fresh spring, and long modest eyelashes veiled his eyes, whose divine radiance drove away, according to the Atlanteans, the influence of evil spirits; necklaces of unknown stones, which were said to have fallen from heaven, sparkling like the tears of the stars, adorned his neck and arms, and gave out mysterious sounds at the slightest of movements like broken words. Her long hair, of an azure black like the crow's wing, unrolled in free and powerful waves over her shoulders, white as the swan's down, and enveloped her, almost up to her heels, in a dark cloud like those which crowned the crater Atanor.

"Ace, Antes, Eris, O Atlantean races who listen to me," she continued, "a thousand times eighty sares have elapsed since the day when Mithra Sunus and his brother Ptah-Fire came to enlighten Sisparis, the one by day, the other by night, when Seoseres, with ram's horns, rushed like the wind from the land of Our, and drove your ancestors to the ends of the earth, for beyond the Atlantisan Sea there are nothing but fogs and uninhabitable countries.

“Six hundred thousand Egyptians, korybantes, maenads, abakantes, commanded by Akmoun with the brow girded with vipers, Sabak with crocodile teeth, Antheou the heron, Anubis the jackal, the bald Silenus, Pan and Asterious, then tread the soil of the ten lands and smite thee, and people of Atlantis! But Mithras and Ptah blow on the conquerors. The chains are broken. Ouranos rushes in. Prometheus snatches fire from the bowels of the earth. Brothers fight against brothers, kinship is despised, it is hard in the world. It is the age of swords that split shields. The Atlanteans are delivered. Akmoun reigned, Kenosh surrounded Sisparis with high walls. Iapetus builds the temple of Atanor. Wirad subdued the Sindica. Atlas reads in the stars. Amenos pushes the plough. Hermes fixes speech and thought on the papyrus. Finally, our own Satourann, the king of kings, the conqueror of the Amazons with their sharp sagari blades, the homicidal Arimaspes and the Scythians with superb hearts, now reigns over the peoples of the moon and the sun.”

Having thus spoken, the Ziris turned towards the temple, and resumed, raising her arms to the top of the volcano:

“O Ptah, benefactor of Sisparis, thou whose fury, appeased by the homage of Iapetus, might shake the world, hear the prayer which I address to thee in the name of all those whom thou seest at thy feet. O Ptah, to the salutary fires, defend us against sickness. Be the remedy we implore for our children and grandchildren. O Ptah, who pierces the darkness, does not forsake us, banishes evil thoughts from us, drives out the impure Devils, the black Rackazas, the evil Buchas, those nocturnal spirits who, in the form of bats, black dogs, harpies, vampires, and ghouls, wander about our dwellings, seeking to drink our blood and trouble our minds.”

All was silent, the prostrate crowd rose, threw an immense clamour into the air and dispersed. The great Ziris returned to the temple. The interior resembled a vast Hypogeum. Sixteen massive square pillars carved out of lava supported a ceiling divided into red-painted coffers.

There is no other opening than the large door giving access to the platform. The glow of the sacred tripods alone illuminated. In the background, a colossal statue of Ptah in red porphyry, represented seated on a throne of flames, the mitre with triple horns on his head and the whip with three straps in his hand.

The Ziris mounted on the knees of the idol and received the homage and offerings of Satourann and his ten Kuretes, officer-counsellors of the throne; The queen, the hakamin astrologers, the learned Kasdims, Pirounis Magi and Mobeds with shaved heads also came to prostrate themselves. She made vows for each one, and they all withdrew. Queen Bahavani alone remained kneeling on the flagstones of the temple, and said:

O sacred Ziris, whom I dare not call my daughter, if I dedicated you to the god of fire, against the will of your father, it was to save you from Mrythiou, the god of death. Ptah, more powerful than he, has preserved you to my tenderness. The king has, to this day, respected my engagement, but he groans to see his posterity end to you. He consulted the oracle of Mithras, who replied: "A race of men of renown will make the earth resound with the sound of their weapons, they will come out of your blood. Ziris! from you alone can this race be born; but to break your vow is to bring upon yourself the vengeance of Ptah; it is death."

"My beloved mother has been pleasing to the gods by betrothing me to the Fire, and I have ratified her word."

"The will of men is very little compared to that of the gods" Bahavani warned. "If you are to love a mortal, you must turn away the death that will befall you. Listen to the dream I have had. A being, having the face of a man, carried you on the top of Atanor. You returned his caresses, and Ptah flew into the air. The earth opened up to swallow you up under a heap of corpses, and you were no more. But, horror! From you, when dead, a child was born, the son of the man who devoured the

mountains, the plains, the cities, the sea, and then nothing existed anymore.

Bahavani untied a bag from her neck of purple and gold, and holding it out to her daughter: "Receive this talisman: it preserves from evil and makes death postpone." It contains a ray of sunshine stolen from Mithras by your ancestor Prometheus; it is the most precious thing I possess. It has guaranteed me to this day from evil spirits, Jinns and Rackasas; but what does my life matter to me when my daughter's life may be threatened?"

"Dear mother!" cried Ziris, descending from the knees of the idol to clasp the queen in her arms, who rose in terror, threw the talisman at her daughter's feet, and fled, crying: "Don't come near me! No touches, do not make me sacrilegious!"

Ziris did not see her mother again except as she lay on the funeral bed. Bahavani died during the night. Kayo-Marath, one of the king's ten Kuretes and the leading man, was charged with carrying this sad news to the Ziris. In her capacity as high priestess, she was to conduct the funeral. She had the strength to overcome her grief before the envoy - the goddesses could not cry - and she went to the palace.

It was so rare that she left the palace, that as she passed through the city, she noticed men, women, and children rushing in her way. They pushed each other, piled up, and competed with each other for her beneficent looks. Some jumped on one foot, or walked on their hands, head downwards; the others climbed on the shoulders of their neighbors to overtake the level of the crowd. Some waved pieces of cloth, others sounded horns or struck shields; all shouted, but none would have been bold enough to speak to her.

Her retinue of temple-maiden, less respected, had difficulty in piercing the crowd which separated her at every moment from the adored Ziris. But she, sad and silent, crossed this human swell which was moving out

of her way as if an invisible force had opened a furrow before her. A servant slipped and brushed in his fall the trailing cloak of the divinity. A hundred arms instantly carried him off and tore him to bloody pieces.

Chapter II

The palace of Satourann, situated at the other end of Sisparis, was a city in itself. They were floors of massive, square buildings, surmounted by terraced roofs; galleries, porticoes, stairs, colonnades; courtyards containing elephants or mammoths, halls for the shelter of slaves and the sleep of servants, stables containing ten thousand horses, lodgings for the numerous retinue of the king of kings. The royal residence, surrounded by gardens, stood like a citadel in the midst of all these buildings. It was carved from a single block of the red porphyry of the mountain. A wide staircase of a hundred steps, flanked by tall bronze statues, led to the platform from which the Atlantean kings were accustomed to promulgate their edicts and harangue the people.

From this tribune, large enough to contain two thousand people, a door, raised by a few steps, gave access to long corridors with a thousand painted and gilded columns, leading to the banquet and audience halls, and to external galleries leading on one side to the king's apartments and on the other to his Gynaecium. For, although Bahavani had been the only legitimate queen, Satourann still had six hundred concubines and many natural children.

The sides of the mountain concealed a whole underground city. Long dark corridors; mysterious staircases descending into deep jails of which no one ever spoke; vast storerooms and the vault of the royal treasury and library of which no one but the king was aware.

Above the main mass rose into the air an immense octagon construction, called the Tower of the Stars, built by the learned Atlas, and intended to consult the gods, to study the firmament, and to watch the horizon. It

was at the highest point of this tower, in a venerated hall, near the clouds, that the king and his Kuretes met, to deliberate at the feet of the idols of Mithras, Ptah, Varuna, Savitri, and the other protective gods of Atlantis.

From this observatory atop the Tower of the Stars the view plunged over the city as into an abyss: In the common streets and squares outside the palace, sun, dust and noise ruled. Wide streets where the wheels of the wagons have dug deep ruts in the pozzolan, brick houses covered with pumice stone slabs or terraced roofs, on which fragrant trees flourish; empty spaces, vague enclosures where cattle graze; a stream that loses itself in the sands of the shore; numerous boats in the harbour full of reefs, the entrance to which is defended by two towers, one dedicated to the sun, the other to the moon, which at night serve as lighthouses; in the centre of the city, surrounded by thick walls and deep ditches, the black Atanor vomiting clouds of smoke.

Beyond the palaces surrounded by gardens, huts, meadows, immense aqueducts climbing among the forests on the slopes of Mount Atlai, which bears the name of the learned astronomer, ancestor of the Ziris; the plains of Eleuzine as far as Oph; the rivers Phleget and Tartarus, gliding like silver dragons in the gold of the harvest; the sea of Cronus, covered with white sails, and, in the distance, in the blue of the air, the indentations of the mountains of Our, with unknown elephant-haunted forests and unfathomable abysses in the earth.

When the great Ziris arrived at the palace, King Satourann had already erected a pyre of a hundred cubits in size. The old queen's body, adorned with her festive garments, was placed on a purple bed which hid the bronze vessels intended to collect the ashes. Ziris sang the funeral hymn as they swayed their bodies. The king had the women who had served the deceased during her life brought in, and in order that she might still have the same servants in death, he had them

slaughtered at the foot of the pyre. Then, in order to show the esteem he had had for his wife, he himself set fire to this mountain of wood.

"O Ptah!" cried the high priestess, "keep, burn, and consume this body, but lend him your assistance in obtaining another envelope to carry it to the god of gods. Let the eye go to the sun, the breath to Varuna, let the earth take back the dust that each one owes to it. But let the immortal part of his being go, in the meantime, to give to the waters and plants what belongs to them."

When the prayers and invocations were over, the king distributed presents and gave a large meal, leaving the priestess and her temple-maids to collect the ashes and carry them to the island of the Blessed. There was a deep den, on the shores of the Erythraean Sea, where it was customary for the funeral urns of the kings and queens of Atlantis to be deposited. It was also customary for the surviving bridegroom to remain shut up for twelve days and nights, without seeing either the light of the sun or that of the torches, and without taking food.

Satourann, unable to refrain from this mourning, charged the first of his Kuretes, Kayo-Marath, to take the best warriors. He would accompany the high priestess and see that she lacked nothing. Then he retired to his Gynaecium, the openings of which he had walled up. His six hundred concubines had to observe fasting and confinement as well as he.

Kayo-Marath was a tall old man with red skin, greenish eyes, and thick eyebrows. His forehead, his cheeks, and even his white beard were covered with the green powder, with which only the Kuretes had the right to adorn themselves. He wore the golden mitre with two bull's horns, the insignia of his Couschite race, and the yellow woollen robe of the royal councillors.

It was a great responsibility for the king's favorite to take charge of the bride of Ptah, the palladium of Atlantis; but he was eager to please his

master, to make himself useful to the Ziris, and to obtain the guidance of the royal treasury.

When everything was ready for departure, Ziris, leaving fifty of her maidens in charge of the temple of Atanor, entered into a covered chariot as large as a house. The urn containing Bahavani's ashes was placed at the bottom, between two golden tripods where the sacred fire burned. Ziris dropped onto the bed that occupied only one corner of the car. The purple veils fell, and the heavy machine began to move under the efforts of twenty white oxen with horns capriciously twisted and gilded. Kayo Marath, unwilling to leave it to anyone to lead the sacred girl, seized the goad and pricked the team.

At the head of the procession marched fifty sentinel warriors; men and horses were covered with bronze scales. Then came thirty light chariots mounted by warriors. Five hundred horsemen with golden quivers and ebony bows, wearing wooden helmets, rode on their sides. A row of long arches with four wheels, containing the baggage, provisions, and a few temple-maidens veiled to the eyes, brought up the rear.

The people of Sisparis were saddened to see their Ziris leave for the first time in their lives. Many wanted to accompany her rather than stay away from her protective influence.

The white oxen did not go fast, and the journey was long. They camped every evening around large fires to keep away the ferocious beasts and clouds of insects. For six days they crossed endless plains covered with swamps; swarms of yellow-billed cormorants flew from the midst of the shimmering reeds. Then for three days they passed through dark forests of tree ferns, palms, and araucarias. It was necessary to cut a way with an axe through the creepers that obstructed the paths.

They then had to cross an arm of the sea. Kayo-Marath could not prevent the island of the Blessed from being surrounded by water. A flotilla was waiting for the funeral procession, but there was not a galley

capable of containing the wheeled house of the Ziris. The house was left in the custody of part of the escort. Ziris embarked on a galley, the prow of which, raised in the shape of a swan's neck, ended in a bull's head painted red. Its interlocking sides imitated the scales of fish; at the stern, raised in the shape of a squirrel's tail, were fixed three long beams which, by their flotation, counterbalanced the massive prow.

The Pelasgian oarsmen, sons of the sea, landed in the evening on the Isle of the Dead. It was a heap of rocks with summits crowned with gigantic pines and a succession of bare hills showing their granite sides. There were the hypogea of the Atlantean kings.

The next day the procession went to the foot of one of these hills, which offered a facade cut steeply into the rock, in the rising sun. A door, raised twenty cubits above the ground, was reopened, the urn deposited and the den of death carefully closed.

Then the young priestess took the road back to Sisparis. All that remained of her mother was the talisman she wore on her breast. The return was long, the Ziris had to stop among different fire-worshipping peoples and receive the homage of several princes subject or tributary of his father; to accept small gifts and return large ones, to distribute looks, and to promise Ptah's protection.

Chapter III

The Atlantean troop was skirting a wood of sycamores, which made a sort of black spot in the midst of the arid and sandy plains, when they met a horde of horsemen armed with spears and covered with animal skins. They escorted a line of wagons with creaking wheels on their wooden axles, pulled by oxen.

At the sight of the white oxen with their golden horns and the cataphracts with shining armour, some of them, for whom this spectacle

was new, rushed to the sides of the caravan. Kayo-Marath thought it was an attack, halted, and was already sending his warriors against them, when one of the strangers, tilting his head downwards, showed them that he had no hostile intention. He was a strong lad with blue eyes like the sky, with white skin, tall, broad-shouldered. A crest of feathered red-golden hair, like to a ray of sunshine at dawn, seemed to increase still more his tall stature. His face, his arms, his bare chest, were adorned with red and green paints which gave him a fierce appearance. Several necklaces of bear claws and boar's tusks encircled his neck. Braies and boots of deerskin, a sling-bag of fox-skin, a heavy axe held in place by a cord of twisted tree-bark, completed his savage adornment.

"Who are you?" asked the Kuret, making a sign to his escort to wait.

"Nemeith the great chief of the tribe of Nemeith, the bravest among all the Scythians."

Nemeith glanced at one of his companions and replied: "And what do you want? Before you tell us, Thor, come forward. You will speak, you will know their language." Thor stepped forward. His hair, as black as night, escaped like the mane of a foal from his fur cap. His face was white as a woman's, his mouth disdainful, and he had flames in his eyes; tall and very strong, as much so as his young friend.

Raising his hand to his lips, the greeting of the Scythians, Thor asked the Kuret, using much the same language as he, if his horsemen were still far from Sisparis.

"Three days. And what are you going to do about it?"

"Tell me who you are and you will know what I am about," replied the young man Nemeith.

Kayo-Marath, after satisfying him, learned in his turn that these newcomers were bearers of the tribute which the Scythians paid every six years to the kings of kings.

“The tribute!” cried the Kuret, “Where is it?”

“Over there, in our waggons”.

“And you did not fear, with such a weak escort, to be robbed on the way?”

“To us they are but transparent stones, shiny pebbles, too small even to shape into puzzle pieces. Who would want them in our steppes?”

Nemeith, the rooster-haired lad who had spoken first, added, whirling his spear: “And who would dare to attack men who do not even fear that the sky will fall?”

“The folk of Nemeith are rich in words, I hear” Kayo-Marath observed mockingly.

“Man with the bull’s horns, if you do not know the Nemeith, do not speak of them,” growled Thor.

“Well, Nemeith or Scythians, you are the allies of my master the king of kings, and I consider you friends. I thank Varuna, the god of heaven, who has given me the opportunity to be of service to you today. Put your oxen at the pace of my oxen, and I myself will lead you on.”

The Scythians accepted the offer, joined their companions, and the caravan set out again.

Thor the Scythian and Nemeith of the Nemeithians had sworn friendship to each other from childhood, that is, they had made a commitment to live and die for each other. Their good and bad fortunes

were to be common, as were their joys, their hopes, and their quarrels. According to the custom of the Scythian nations, they had sanctioned their pact, in the presence of the warriors, by cutting the tips of their fingers from which they had received and mixed the blood in a vase. After dipping their weapons in it, they had each drunk half of it.

The Scythians wondered what could be contained in the vast wheeled house of Ziris.

“Perhaps it holds Saturann,” said Hu-gadarn, a Kimri chief, who also bore his share of the tribute from the Kimri.

Og, a blond and hairy German like a bear, replied: “Since he is said to be higher than an oak, this great rolling house must be his chariot.”

Herser, a stout, bearded Scythian, with eyes as green as the sea, ventured to say that it might be Atanor, worshipped by the Atlanteans in the form of a black stone which concealed fire in its sides.

“Atanor is a fire-mountain,” replied Thor.

“In that case,” replied the simple Herser, “it cannot be that... the chariot would be too small.”

“Warriors!” cried young Nemeith, “it is easy to find out what is the matter.”

And pushing Asp his horse forward, he came prancing around the cart, uttered wild cries which were answered by the barking of his wild dogs, then, as a game, he stood up in his saddle, and, to attract the attention of the person shut up in the house, he approached and struck the sides with his fist.

A purple veil was lifted, and Ziris, half leaning out of the carriage, showed her face, resplendent with youth and beauty. They were both dumb with surprise. Their eyes spoke to each other.

"By Heimdall, the father god!" cried Nemeith at last, "you are the fairest of the stars in heaven!" "Begone!" replied the priestess, red with shame or anger, motioning him with her slender hand to go away.

But Nemeith, still standing on the rump of his horse, seized that sacred hand which no mortal had ever touched, and in a sudden blaze of savage love he bit it lightly.

The Ziris cried out in fear, threw herself quickly into the back of the carriage and hid her attacked hand from the sight of all. Kayo-Marath was too busy goading his oxen, and the people of the escort were too far away to have seen the action of Nemeith.

But if men were deaf to the cry of the sacred Ziris, they heard all when heaven and earth was moved. A roll was heard like that of a hundred war chariots. A whirlwind blew the leaves and branches of the forest, lifted mounds of sand, twisted them and raised them in spirals towards the sky. As some of the horses fled, the oxen pressed against each other and lay down; as howls pierce the roar of the gust, and wild beasts passed by, driven racing from their lairs by the shaking of the earth.

The Scythians, as if accustomed to such, merely bunched together on horseback. United they sang:

> "By the wind and by the axe!
> Are we not men, to be afraid of this?
> The dwarves of the deeps tremble and groan,
> but the sons of Heimdall sing, sing!
>
> We are not afraid of death!
> Friends, companions, let us sing,

and if the sky splits, let us laugh,
let us sing again, let us sing again,
and strike the gods themselves
- should they defy *us*!"

The wind ceased as quickly as it had risen, and the airy clouds of sand collapsed.

Kayo-Marath, with frightened eyes, looked at Ziris, who, paler than the goddess of death, was now standing in the bow of her wheeled house, could not speak. He dared not ask her the cause of this cry of terror: to question her would perhaps have brought greater misfortunes.

Ziris merely pointed out the Scythians, and said: "Who are these demons that defy the gods and cause their anger?"

"The Scythians, tributaries of the king of kings."

"Was not one of them riding near a moment ago? He spoke, and his audacity will have irritated Ptah."

The questions were not answered, for to argue with Ziris was death. They set off again, leaving a part of the escort lost in the woods, buried under the falling sands, or running out over the plain after the horses that had fled.

The Scythians continued to follow.

"What did you see in the golden chariot?" asked Thor of his friend.

"A star like Venus at her brightest!" he replied.

They halted to pass the hot hours of the day in the shade of a gigantic laurel tree, the trunk of which measured no less than sixty cubits in circumference. The height of the stem to the first branches was such that

vultures perched in the branches looked like sparrows. From its black foliage dripped a beautiful and clear water which formed a thousand rivulets running through the flowers.

The whole caravan found its place under this dome of verdure. Ziris sat down by one of those trickles of water that murmured through the mosses. The temple-maidens kept their distance out of respect. The Scythians had killed a sheep and were eating it half raw.

Thor saw the Ziris and forgot about his meal. He got up and, to get a better look at her, then he came and sat down on a root shaped like a crawling monster.

Ziris raised her head and let a look fall on him. He leaped like a tiger to his feet.

Kayo-Marath rushed at him to hold him back. The temple-maidens veiled their faces. The slaves fled, and the sentinels prepared their arrows. The Scythians seized the stone axes and made a rampart of their bodies.

“Don’t come near me!” cried Ziris. The Kuret took him by the arm and led him away from the girl with the sweet looks. Thor let himself be led. He did not understand; but presently, pointing to the priestess, he said to her:

“Old man of the bull race, I ask you to marry your daughter.”

“My daughter?” cried the Kuret. “She does not belong to me, I have no so much honour. The father of this deity is Saturann, and none other than the god Ptah can be the husband of the Ziris.”

Thor lowered his head and joined his companions. Nemeith, leaning over the bank of the stream, was washing his painted face, the markings now half obliterated by the journey.

Ziris looked at him also, and when he saw his manly and beautiful face all clean, such as the father god had made, his heart beat faster. She thought she still felt the brush of her lips on her burning hand, and saw the imprint of her teeth. She wanted to think of Ptah; but her eyes could not detach themselves from this fiery-haired demon, who seemed now more formidable and more divine.

She regretted that she was Ziris, and as she leaned over the stream, a tear rolled down her cheek and fell in the current that carried it towards Nemeith.

He was stooping down to drink the water, when Thor saw him glance towards Ziris.

"If you are my friend," he said, "you will not love this young girl. She will give you only tears."

"I will drink them gladly!" replied Nemeith.

But then a shuddering roar raised the Scythian to his feet. A lion was about to launch himself on the Ziris. She stood motionless under the power of its gaze and yet she implored him, in the name of Ptah, to return to his deserts. The animal beat the flanks of its tail, its tawny eyes gleamed, and its slavering jaws could be heard.

Thor rushed forward, threw himself at the panting bulk and hit the beast on his muzzle. From the furious blow he has struck, the Scythian rolled aside and fell beside the Ziris. The lion took three steps back, tried to stagger onto his feet, fell, then let out a low moan and groaned, his muzzle covered in red blood.

Thor sprang on the beast, wrestled the neck and snapped the head back with a savage crack. Then, pointing to the Ziris, he said: "Ptah would not have saved you from his talons."

“Tell me your name and I will mix it with my prayers,” she gasped, offering him a great honour.

“Thor cares neither for your prayers nor for your gods. He asks you, as a reward, to love him.”

Ziris hid her face in her hands and said to him: “Ask me everything except that.”

“I want nothing else. And what Thor wants, you have to want it.”

“Leave! let no one hear you: you will die.”

“The fear of death is unknown to me; but I wish to please you... so I will obey”.

He walked away. The Ziris and the retinue set off again.

For three days the Scythian was intoxicated by the sight of Ziris. But he did not know how to inspire the love he felt.

“I esteem your bravery, I owe you my life,” she said to him on day, “but I am the bride of a god and can only love him.”

“I will kill your god!” replied the Scythian. Nemeith stood aside. Seeing his friend’s love, he had at first sought to turn him away from it as an impossible thing, but Thor’s will was so firm, his project of carrying off a bride so fixed - even if King Satourann did not grant it - that Nemeith had to silence his own heart. For he, too, found the daughter of the king of the Atlanteans more beautiful and desirable than all the women of Scythia. For a barbarian who knew no law but his appetites and his good pleasure, to renounce to be loved, out of respect for holy friendship, was the greatest of sacrifices: was Nemeith capable of it?

~*~

The sun was sinking into the sea, when the walls of Sisparis, Atanor, and the high palace of the Atlantean kings, with its gigantic tower, appeared on the horizon.

Satourann, whose mourning had expired, came with the court to receive his daughter at the gates of the city. The whole population rushed and murmured to the gates like a river in its path. The priests and the temple-maidens came to meet her, singing the praises of Ptah, and Ptah himself made his fires shine brighter than ever to testify the joy he felt at seeing his bride again.

Instead of escorting her to the temple of Atanor, the king begged her to go to the palace, to the Hall of The Stars. There he wished to converse with her without witnesses of things of the greatest importance. When they were alone, Satourann, after bowing three times before her, with both hands to her forehead, spoke to her thus:

"I respected your mother's will all her life. In dedicating you to the worship and bed of Ptah, she had not consulted me. I promised nothing, swore nothing to your fiery betrothed, and death, by taking Bahavani from my tenderness, has restored me to my freedom. You are my only legitimate daughter, and the gods have let me know that my race must not become extinct. They leave you free to choose a husband, one... less sublime than Ptah. Yet you will continue to maintain his temple. You will be not only the goddess Ziris - to all but your husband - but also the heiress to the throne of Atlantis, the sacred princess. Then, after my death, the sovereign of the known world! I have sent messages to the kingdoms of Kos and to the Ombos, and as far as the Nile of Egypt, so that the suitors for your hand may present themselves at the next festivals of Mirhagan. I like to believe that the greatest on earth will want to cast eyes upon you."

Ziris had listened to her father in silence. At first, she felt dizzy when she felt free. The image of the pale Getae man had appeared to her, and then that of the brawny Scythian slaying the lion at his feet. They were both beautiful men. One had dared to touch her without being annihilated by her fiery fiance, the other had saved her from death.

She agreed, and also agreed to the proposal to leave Atanor and its burning sanctuary with its fiery lava copings, for the cool shade and hanging gardens of the palace. But she was still afraid of Ptah's vengeance, and would not make any decision, give no answer until she had consulted the great oracle in the lair of Mithras.

The king approved of this wise course and, full of hope, conducted her back to Atanor. The next day, at the hour when the sun rises, the king came with great pomp to fetch Ziris to go to the Atlai.

She mounted an open cart, drawn by twenty-four plumed horses, adorned with wings, and led in hand by the Kuretes. The king followed in another chariot. The procession went round the city so that the inhabitants could receive the benefit of the glances of their Ziris; then they reached the plain. Arriving at the foot of the mountain, she leaped out of the chariot and advanced alone through the undergrowth to the foot of a sheer rock. A rope fell perpendicularly from a fissure forty cubits above the ground. She seized it, wrapped her wrists, and invisible hands carried it up into the lair of Mithras.

It was there, or so the uninitiated said, that the personified god was born of stone and fire. The cave was deserted, and yet, from a block of rock crystal, a flame gushed forth which threw reddish gleams on the offerings hanging from the walls. She approached the altar and said, stretching out her hand:

"O thou, of ten thousand looks, O Mithras, mediator between man and the sovereign god, Mithra-Light, Lucifer, Usana! the sacred hand has been defiled by the mouth of a man, perhaps of an Evil Devil. Burn it."

She put her hand in the hearth. The flame disappeared and it was surrounded by darkness.

“O Mithras,” she continued, “am I so guilty that you refuse to purify me? I will go to Ptah, my betrothed and my master, and I will give him my fist, my arm, and my body. He burns, he annihilates!

“Keep your hand!” replied a mysterious voice, which seemed to come from the crystal altar.

“If I come here,” replied Ziris, “it is that you may make known to me your will, O divine Mithras. The king of kings asks me to choose a mortal husband: by obeying him, I fear to displease Ptah. Speak, O Mithras, enlighten me with your wisdom, and I will obey your commands.

The voice answered: “I, greater and more powerful than Ptah, release you from your oaths, do the will of your father. It is that of Ahura Mazda the great, the only, the master of everything. Withdraw.”

The fire reappeared on the altar, and Ziris, seizing and wrapping the rope, came down as she had been brought, without having seen anyone.

She returned to Saturan and told him that she would make known to him who was to be her husband during the next feast of Mirhagan.

The heart of the king of kings swelled with pride and he began to despise Ptah.

That same evening, the inhabitants of Sisparis, assembled at the foot of the platform of harangues, learned from the mouth of the monarch that the Ziris could marry a mortal and give a successor to the throne, without ceasing to be Ziris.

Most of them accepted the mystery without reflection. But some, wiser, saw it as an insult to Ptah, and predicted that the god would avenge himself.

CHAPTER V

The next day the Scythians, led by Kayo-Marath, climbed the hundred steps of the porphyry palace. Did the grandeur, boldness, and splendor of the edifice compel the admiration of the Scythians? They seemed struck only by the aspect of the royal person. Satourann was of tall stature. His forehead, surmounted by a diadem with a triple row of golden horns, his long white beard plaited and intertwined with pearls, his golden face, his sumptuous clothes, his jewels and his glittering weapons made him the equal of a god.

In order to impose more on the foreigners, he received them in the Audience Hall with the hundred pillars of orichalcum, the powerful work of the Cyclops. These pillars supported a ceiling painted blue and studded with gold stars to imitate the firmament. The king was on his throne, surrounded by his Kuretes, his iron-clad warriors, and the most beautiful girls of the court. At a sign from Kayo-Marath, the Scythians approached.

"King of kings," said Thor, "may the god of gods, of the sky, of the stars, and of all that lives, dies, and is reborn, protect you and yours! I bring thee in the name of the Scythians, my friends and brothers, the tribute which they owe thee. But I warn you, o great one, that we are tired of picking up pebbles from you. This is the last time we will come."

"But then," replied Satourann, "if you refuse tribute in the future, it is war that you want?"

"We do not seek it, but if you do it to us, we will not refuse it."

“Saturann!” said Nemeith in his turn, “the time is no longer when our ancestors, ill-armed, fled before your warriors. Their sons have good green jasper axes and swift arrows; Our mothers have given birth to a race of titans and we are ready to fight if need be.

“That’s well spoken,” cried Hu-gadarn with the brown face and the quick tongue, standing up. “I could not have said it better.”

Satourann made no reply, he rolled the pearls of his beard in his fingers.

Kayo-Marath spoke: “War enriches no one, and if our allies, the Scythians, will not bring us any more pebbles, let them allow some men to go and gather from their land. Then these bold men will not be troubled by hard labour.”

The barbarians looked at each other without knowing whether to consent or refuse. They feared some trap.

The king saw their distrust: “I do not want any more quarrel with the peoples who have the white horse for their emblem than with those of the tribe of the Rooster. Here we are in the month of Mithras, when free men celebrate the festivals of Mihragan; let my friends, these Titans and the Giants of the mountains of Kaf, stay with me and consult with each other. They will answer me after the holidays.”

“You are a great king, and you speak well,” replied the golden-haired warrior. “We will take advice from our elders.”

“May your god Heimdall give you health!” replied Satourann.

“May your god light your way! Here is what we bring you for this tribute-day”.

Then the Scythians poured streams of golden granules and precious stones out onto the long bronze tables. The men there opened their eyes

greedily. Their wives and daughters brought vases of water, and, with their sleeves rolled up to their shoulders, began to wash and sort the zircon, topazes, beryls, chalcedony, and opals, shouting with surprise and admiration. They showed them to each other, looked at them through the light, made them sparkle in the sun or shimmer in the shadows.

Kayo-Marath congratulated the king on having the possessors of such riches as tributaries. He took an especially large zircon from a young girl and showed it to his master, and quietly forgot to return it.

This young girl was tall for her age and well made. Although she had a somewhat reddish skin like all those of her race, she was beautiful; her nostrils were sensual, her eyes ardent, and her lips so red, her teeth so white, that she had a right to the admiration of men. A bull's head, painted small and green in the middle of her forehead, showed that she was part of the king's household. Her silky black hair escaped in little tresses intermingled with pearls and corals, from under her head-dress of feathers and emeralds imitating a sparrowhawk, whose erect head seemed like a crest and the folded wings the ears of a feathered helmet. Her arms, wrists, and legs were adorned with gold rings. Her skirt, made of a network of glass beads, was held back by straps crossed over her throat, barely hidden under a profusion of necklaces.

Taking advantage of a moment when she thought she was not being observed, she took a carbuncle in her mouth.

"Is it therefore good to eat?" Nemeith asked her, approaching her with a smile.

She bowed her head without answering, and swallowed.

"If you are dumb and have no words for me," he continued, "it is a great pity, for you are beautiful. You have hair that would make a beautiful trophy at the entrance to a tent." And to admire her better, he put his

hand on her head; but when he saw her turn pale with anger, he understood that he had offended her, and, to appease her, he drew a sapphire from his fur bag and handed it to her.

“Will you give me this stone?” she said with shining eyes.

“Yes, but I ask for the delight of seeing your pretty lips swallow it.”

She took the sapphire and made it disappear in a way that delighted him, eyes flashing. Then she asked him: “Do you have a lot of them?”

“Enough to fill you and choke you.”

She smiled and went back to washing the king’s gems, looking at Nemeith and his bag, which she supposed to be well-filled.

A young Atlantean companion, with white skin and gazelle eyes, nudged Nemeith and said to him: “Look, in her hair and on her chest, what this other girl does with the stones she swallows.”

This discovery made him laugh, and looking at the young girl more closely he saw he saw she was wearing a simple dress of fowl feathers sticky on her flexible hips, but had gems on her hair and on her budding breasts. He said to her: “You like pebbles too, do you?”

“No. The Harpies and the Thieves alone eat stones.”

“Who is that beautiful swallower over there? The one I was with a moment ago?”

“Mouza, Kayo-Marath’s legitimate wife.”

“And you, who are you?”

“Hanaid, daughter of Bolkai the Cyclops.”

“You seem as gentle as a dove and as fresh as the peach blossom. The warrior who shelters you in his tent will have nothing more to wish for.”

“I am a girl,” she answered, blushing “but I am soon expecting my betrothed”.

Just then the arrival of new tributaries set the inhabitants of the palace all in a uproar. The girl looked back to her glittering work.

CHAPTER VI

“The Amazons! the Amazons!” was shouted on all sides. The women fled in terror into the corners of the hall, the priests hid themselves behind the pilasters and crossed their legs, and guards ranged themselves around the throne.

A young and beautiful girl, wearing a lion’s head, whose tawny mane mingled with the thick waves of her amber hair; with their flanks pressed in the skin of a black panther, their legs and chest bare, came forward. She was followed by fifty warriors, all dishevelled from travel, but beautiful, and fierce. Their leader held a green palm as a sign of peace. At her side shone a sagaris, a double-edged iron axe, and on her white shoulder hung a bow with arrows in the mouth of a wildcat which served the arrows as a quiver.

She stopped at the foot of the throne and said with a superb air: “King of the islands of the sun and the moon, Arthemis, queen of the boundless plains, has come, not because you had called her, but because it pleased her to come.”

At these insolent words, Satourann turned pale with anger and bit his lips; but he restrained himself, and replied calmly: “Is this the speech that a tributary should make to the king of kings, sons of the gods? I

wanted you to come, you came, and this act of submission is enough for me."

The Amazon crumpled the palm branch in her clenched hands, and, shaking her mane said: "Arthemis only raises her axe. Satourann is not her master, and if, when the last snows fell, he defeated a handful of women, he did not conquer - for this the nation of the Amazons. Arthemis can raise a hundred thousand shields. She is as implacable in hatred as she is faithful in friendship. It brings you peace or war: choose!"

Satouranu held his tongue, too cautious to bring upon himself the screeching vengeance of a hundred thousand warriors. Then he was politic: "Are you not afraid that by coming thus to defy me in my palace, you will meet your death there?" Speak, what do you want?

"Give me back my Amazons, those that you hold back, your prisoners since the fighting. We know you have them."

The king did not answer.

"Do you refuse?" asked the young queen.

The king's voice was weary. "I can only send you their hair, hanging in the temple of Ptah."

Arthemis broke the green palm and threw the pieces at the foot of the throne.

To appease her, Kayo-Marath broke in and abruptly offered the abandonment of the plains of Eleuzine all the way to the sea.

But the girl raised her head proudly. "Do you think," she said, "that you can pay for the blood of my companions with a few cubits of grass? May the gods send you wisdom!"

And she went out, looking with contempt at the sentinels and guards, who now threatened her with notched arrows.

Satourann the king ordered her to be allowed to go without molesting her.

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As the warrior girls vaulted onto horseback near the foot of the palace, Nemeith approached their smouldering queen and said to her: “I had heard of you as a valiant woman, and I thought you were more like a man than a goddess. You are resplendent as the sun, brave as your warriors, and... I wanted to tell you that.”

“Do you take me for a woman of your own kind, someone for whom you must mix myrrh with your words? I am a warrior.”

“I’m a warrior too; give me your friendship.”

“Who are you? Even the Amazons have manners. Introduce yourself!”

“Nemeith, the rooster of may land called *Getia* in our tongue”.

“By the father god! Now I have a pretty red rooster for a friend!” cried the Amazon, mockingly.

Nemeith took pride in the beauty and colour of his hair. Offended, he replied, “I do not know whether you hang hair in your hut; but, certainly, you have never taken away one that was as good as mine.”

Arthemis was hurt in her turn, to hear the bloody trophies that adorned her palace of tree trunks lowered in jest. She pushed her horse on him to crush him; but with his iron hand Nemeith made the beast bend on its hocks.

He said: “Wicked girl! you deserve to bite some sand!”

Arthemis, slipping a little from the saddle, instead sprang off to the ground. A shout to her warriors told them not to interfere: “You are going to die,” she said to Nemeith, seizing her arrows.

Their quarrel was quick but it had already attracted people: the five hundred steps were soon covered with curious people; women appeared at the windows and on the galleries of the palace. Thor and the Scythians came to their companion. On seeing the combatants Thor drove the men away, saying:

I’d like to see out golden-haired rooster bow his crest to a hen. I’ll wager he does not.”

“On your knees, dog!” cried the Amazon, jumping back and drawing an arrow.

“If we were alone, I should not blush to obey a beautiful girl like you; but in front of all these brave warriors, it would be a shame.”

“Obey!” she continued, nothcing her arrow and adjusting it on the string.

“You have eyes that make the heart jump. I cannot look away. My heart is yours.”

An arrow whistled in the air and pierced his shoulder. Without a sound he pulled it out and handed it, smiling to Amazon.

“So badly targeted: start again.”

“I will strike you in the heart,” she replied, seizing and breaking the arrow angrily.

And to brave it, he presented her with his broad, white breast.

She would strike him there. But Nemeith was still bravely impassive. He needed no pleading. His youth, his beauty and his courage spoke for him. The queen of the Amazons lowered her weapon, seized his hair by its golden crest, and, shaking his head, said: "Suppose instead I take away that golden hair of which you are so proud?"

"I would be happy to leave you a souvenir of me; but when I have lost my scalp, you will look at me no more than a cropped dog or a plucked goose".

"Pah! Go away!" she said, as she went away.

Myrrhine, an Amazon, then approached Nemeith:

"Man" she said to him, "be serious now. Let me close your wound. Warrior, my name is Anthares; I am young and valiant, you are beautiful and brave, I offer you half of my tent."

Then another Amazon came to him and said: "Do you want my friendship?" Then a third.

He wondered to himself: "Have I conquered the hearts of all these warriors? Perhaps is is because they have no men. Or so it is rumoured."

At a sign from their leader, the Amazons disappeared in a cloud of dust. Nemeith returned to his friends. A leech among them applied a clod of grass to his wound, uttered three words he did not understand, and took him to drink sweet beer so as to replace the blood he had lost. The other Scythians returned to the Audience Hall to take back the baskets in which they had brought the great dusty tribute. They valued the strong woven containers more than the contents.

From the top of the galleries the daughter of Satourann had seen the courage and gentleness of the man who had faced the queen of the Amazons. She admired him, and her heart was his.

CHAPTER VII

Instead of following his companions, Thor wandered around the palace. He was bored and wanted to see the daughter of Satourann. That was all his desire.

He had already passed through many rooms of silk and marble, walked through many smooth stone terraces, when he found himself on an external staircase in front of a monster who violently barred his way. She was a black-skinned dwarf. Thor repulsed her; but she, clinging to his legs, said: "Back! This stair leads to Ziris, and no one can enter her house."

The Scythian simply tossed the dwarf aside and passed on.

On entering the Gynaecium, he found himself in the middle of a terraced garden planted with flowering lemon trees of powerful scent. Emerald-colored snakes slipped through the grass as he approached and took refuge in a pool where two swans were swimming.

A young girl presented herself before him: it was the slender handmaiden Hanaid who looked at him with the eyes of a startled gazelle.

"Where is this great Scythian going?" she cried, filled with panic.

He drew from his satchel a handful of gems and offered them to the young girl.

“In your country,” said he, “nothing is done for nothing: hide this big handful and then take me to your mistress.”

Hanaid looked at him and suddenly became confused. She refused the present, but, seizing his hand, said: “Come quickly. I hear the black dwarf Ab coming back with the sentinels, and... they want your death!”

She led him to a secret door and up by narrow stairs lost in the mountain range, and out onto a courtyard in which rose a great noise. Five hundred blacksmiths struck and beat blocks of red iron in time and fashioned them into helmets, swords and shields.

“This is not where Ziris lives!” said Thor, as he entered.

“You were lost, and I saved you from Ab. Be thankful.”

A man with a broad chest, hard and gnarled hands, skin reddened by the heat of the furnaces, and naked to the stomach, walked to and fro, giving orders, and the workers obeyed instantly. He had the great eye of Osiris painted on his forehead. Bolkai was his name. Without this chief of the Cyclops, there would be no steel swords or bronze corselets; and no well-armed warriors who rode bravely out to make the nations tremble. Satourann therefore considered him the most important of his Kuretes.

Throgh the steams he noted that Hanaid had slipped into his domain. “What are you doing here?” This is not the place of young girls, and still less that of foreigners!”

“Father,” she replied, “the Scythian would give me a large handful of gems; I would not accept them without your consent. The Cyclops, turning to Thor, held out his heavy hammer to him, and, pointing to a

red-hot iron bar the size of his thigh, he said to him: “Would you flatten this in one fell swoop?”

Thor raised his arm, struck the iron with a fist that was harder, flattened it, and split the anvil.

“Do what custom commands.”

Hanaid detached from her neck an ivory plate on which was engraved the eye of Osiris. She broke it into two pieces and gave one to the Scythian, saying: “My father’s house is now Yours.”

Thor, accepting the pledge replied: “We also know the duties of hospitality, and if you or yours go to Scythia, my wagons will be welcome you and yours.”

The girl answered: “You can now offer me your jewels, I accept them.”

Thor handed over his whole foxskin bag.

“Take what you wish” said he; “if you will allow me speak to Ziris”.

Hanaid made a sign of consent, carefully chose but two amethysts only, called the Cyclops to witness the gift which the Scythian was making, and, addressing his father said: “He has broken your anvil” in a low voice. “The dream I had was therefore not deceptive. He must be the man I dreamed of.”

“Hmmm. I will enquire this of him this evening, during our supper. Come, the work here is finished”. He called out to his workers, and the courtyard dime was stilled.

A moment later, the three of them, in the same chariot, were rolling out a private entrance to the forges, over a dusty road and heading for

Bolkai's dwelling outside the city. The black dwarf Ab watched them go, from a high tower far above.

Thor, who had been much more occupied in admiring the work of the forge than in observing the father and daughter, did not suspect the designs they had upon him.

The Cyclops' dwelling was large and well supplied with attendants: Bolkai was rich because of his ancestors, hiw skills and because of the generosity of the king. Had he been otyherwise then the king might have had to depend on dwarves for his metalwork. Hanaid thus showed Thor guest houses, stables, sheds, horses, herds, concubines, jewels and great store of fine provisions. The Scythian looked without seeing and yawned. She then took him into the gardens, sat down by a spring gushing out in a basin of pink stone, under the acacias in bloom, and called him to her.

He obeyed without understanding the guile. Hanaid raised her large gazelle eyes to him and said: "All that you have seen may be yours if you say to my father, 'Bolkai, give me your daughter for a wife.'"

Thor looked at her and still failed to understand. He wanted only Ziris.

"By offering me precious stones," she continued, "you have given me the right to consider you as my betrothed: by accepting them, I have pledged myself to you."

"I love another girl," replied the Scythian as he rose.

"Who is this female?" she winced.

"The Princess of the Ziris, who you call..."

"The Ziris!" cried Hanaid, throwing herself on her face to the ground, as if she feared that the lightning would burst. Then, rising, she resumed:

“You play with my credulity; it would be as much to say that you are in love with the goddess Vai, or all cosmic space that stretches in the heavens above. Come to my father, and I will serve you all my life. Such is the will of the gods, who, in a dream, made me glimpse the fist of my husband: it was yours!”

Hanaid had knelt before the Scythian. She looked up at him so ardently, she was so young, so attractive, she showed him so much love, that Thor almost forgot Ziris for a moment, drew the Cyclops’ daughter to his breast, and put her mouth on his. But uncouth thoguh he was, he immediately remembered the duties of hospitality. He reproached the girl for wanting to make him forget them, spoke to her harshly, and walked away without casting a glance behind him.

In the evening the Cyclops found his daughter lying unconscious with weeping in the place where the Scythian had kissed and broken her soul.

CHAPTER VIII

From the morning of the first day dedicated to the feasts of Mihragan, the population of Sisparis had, with loud cries, greeted the dawn by hanging out huge shining sails. Ziris put on her mantle the color of flames, girded on the golden breastplates of the princesses of royal blood, and put on her head the cidaris, on which the sun was depicted. She went, followed by her thousand maids of honour and her faithful sentinels, to the platform of the palace. She mounted a higher platform covered with purple veils, and the king Satourann sat respectfully on a throne below her. Clouds of white doves flew up into the blue.

The bronze doors opened, and the suitors for the hand of the great heiress rushed forward like a flood and filled the courts, while the approaches of the palace hummed with the muttered luck-wishes of their numerous retinues.

Surtur, king of Cos, presented himself first. He was tall, black-skinned, bushy-haired, fiery eyed, though flat-nosed and with protruding cheekbones and thick lips. His braided beard was sprinkled with gold flakes and his forehead was girded with a crown of crocodile teeth. He wore two tunics, one of purple, the other of linen. His neck, ears, arms, and legs were overloaded with necklaces and rings of solid gold. He bore the heavy gold well. Two swords shone on each hip. Followed by a few officers of his household, he climbed the hundred steps. His royal cloak was so long that it swept twenty cubits behind him. He stepped forward heavily, holding a long sceptre of chiselled ivory, and prostrated himself before the goddess of Atlantis.

Arhimaz, prince of Our, came next. He had a brown skin, a golden mitre covered his black hair, and his tunic, which fell over his red leather boots, was so laden with embroidery and ornaments that the blue background of the fabric was scarcely visible.

Kais, the third suitor, was king of the Ombos. Twenty years old, beardless, with olive skin, a hooked nose, a receding forehead, a stupidly open mouth, long half-closed eyes. He stumbled up the unfamiliar steps, showing weak eyesight and a clumsy bearing. Dressed in a woollen tunic and wearing a diadem of feathers, he wanted to kneel before the Ziris and salute the king together; but his squinting eyes mistook one for the other. King Surtur pointed out his mistake to him and he was angry. The Black King turned his back on the idiot and asked Satourann for permission to present his gifts to the Ziris.

Consent was given. At a sign from King Surtur, a thousand Ethiopian warriors paraded below under the walls of the palace, saluting their king with the sound of high conch shell-horns. Half of their bodies were painted with vermilion and the other half with plaster white. They wore on their backs horseskins whose head, ears, and mane made a helmet for them. They were armed with sharp-tipped clubs, hippopotamus-leather shields, and whirling-nets.

Five hundred horsemen came next in light chariots, the walls of which were lined with quivers full of long arrows. They were wearing crocodile jaws and armed with huge bows.

Then thirty perfect camels, covered with those transparent veils which were made at Kos, and led by black slaves, completed Surtur's presents.

Satourann accepted all these for his daughter, and the two kings embraced each other. The court saw in this mark of affection a sign of preference given to King Surtur. He was surely the suitor to be favoured.

Then the rich Arhimaz stepped forward and said in a mocking tone: "King of kings, after the gift you have just received, I dare not ask you to have mine accepted by the divine princess." He with a flourish he commanded their appearance. A hundred steeds appeared, on whose necks shone circles of gold. They were nothing like those used by the Atlanteans. They were smaller, less high, mounted on legs that promised the utmost speed.

"These hundred anoplotheres," says the Prince of Our, "all have surpassed the fastest horses in any race. They are soft and easy to mount. Let the princess accept them. As for you, my ally, I have caused a thousand muids of wheat to be carted into your winter silos."

The king gave him an embrace.

The bumbling Kais said in turn: "Erm... I could only find a hundred and twenty mammoths docile enough for the service of the Ziris." Immediately, at a gesture of the feeble king of the Ombos, elephants as high as houses, hairy as bears, with hanging ears, bushy tails, and long curved tusks, advanced, bareback riders causing them to beating the air with their trunks.

The king, awed the sight of these potential moving battle-citadels, congratulated himself on having such an ally as Kais. He deigned to kiss the lad.

King Surtur rolled his eyes and blubbered his lips. But perhaps he alone knew what a mighty gift these tame mammoths really were, and more than a hundred! With these he could conquer empires! He decided he must make this elephant prince blunder again, in a way that would further discredit him.

As the mammoth trumpets faded, there were heard the soft vibrations of brazen blades and gongs. These warned the Atlantean people that their Ziris was going for the first time to eat her meal in public and - during that very feast - to choose one of the three princes.

CHAPTER IX

On the arrival of the guests in the Banquet Hall, five hundred girls, covered with feather dresses and with painted faces, intoned the beautiful song of betrothal. Sadly one hundred black-skinned followers of King Surtur , dressed in tiger skins and their heads surrounded by iron bands armed with horns, accompanied them, blowing reeds in what sounded like an unholy racket. Then the hand-maidens drew plaintive sounds from silken cords stretched over the tortoise shells, as the Cyclops workers of Bolkai, in sign of joy, softly beat their hammers against each other.

The statues of Mithras, Ptah, Varuna, Angramanyu himself, and many other idols of wood or metal, were brought and laid on beds at the head table. The Ziris took her place below them with the king her father. The Kuretes, and assorted hakamins, kasdims, pirounis, mobeds, scholars, physicians, astrologers, priests, princes, pretenders, ambassadors, Scythians, courtiers, captains, and petty warriors, all ranged themselves,

according to their importance, before long tables forming a hemicycle around those of the gods.

Each of the suitors, wishing to give a high idea of his riches, had ranged behind him his most valiant warriors and his ensigns.

Surtur had made a pile of his most precious possessions, his weapons, his jewels, twenty golden vessels in which perfumes burned and mingled to no great overall effect, though they usefully masked the odour of the saddles and harnesses of his horses.

Bumbling Kais had tried to get his mammoths in; but the vast hall could not have contained them all. Only ten of these animals were let in, the ones with golden-plated trunks, could find a place and stood placidly behind him. This, at least, was proof of how tame the beasts were.

Arhimaz had found his anoplotheres where far too skittish and peckish for the feast. He had instead surrounded himself with a phalanx of pretty young girls crowned with vine wreaths. This was meant to suggest the fine wines his people were rumoured to produce, though none were on the tables.

Thor sat next to Nemeith who had wedged his humble standard in the crack between tables: a flag painted red at the end of a wooden pole. At the sight of this insignia, Ziris turned pale. She suddenly understood that the 'rooster' her mother had dreamed of, the day before her death, was none other than this warrior with the flamboyant hair.

Each one sat down and took a dish, a cup, and a pile of wheat cakes with honey. No girl but Ziris was allowed to sat down at this meal. The king's concubines, and the wives or daughters of all the great personages of the court, performed the office of the servants on that day, and poured out the king's wine for the guests.

Hanaid placed herself behind Thor, in order to serve him and show him that she had no resentment. She had not given up on making herself loved by him. Mouza, the beautiful gem-swallower, found himself near Nemeith. She had adorned herself with her richest fabrics and her heaviest necklaces. Half-naked, she had taken care to tan her arms and breasts with clay-powder to be more attractive.

The tables were covered with quarters of venison: wild boars, soused heads of broad-branched deer, oryx, even cave bears. Peacocks with anise, swans with mint and saffron, bread of fish paste, eggs of epiornis, long-legged birds that had become rare, were brought; one of these eggs was enough to satisfy twenty guests; but the most sought-after dish was a huge creature like a salamander, three cubits long, prepared with honey, pepper, and assa-foetida.

Bumbling Kais found the 'salamander' dish such a delicacy that he ate it three times and almost suffocated as its spiciness made itself slowly known. Big black King Surtur remarked on his intemperance at the taste of a spicy dish, and was filled with joy at seeing the Ziris smile in contempt.

Ziris, in order to conform to the custom of taking only a little food in a common place, contented herself with the humble presents sent by the Pharaoh Ozymandias with his poignant regrets at not being present - a single golden apple apparently gathered in the land of the Hesperides, and a single banana.

Then the king stood up and said: "By the will of Mithras and the gods who deign to preside over this banquet, with the acquiescence of Ptah and the consent of the Ziris, let the kings and princes who aspire to the hand of the heiress to the throne of the ten lands show themselves. The bride will make known the happy mortal called to give a race of heroes to Atlantis, by sending, according to custom, her nuptial ring to the one she has chosen."

The black Surtur raising his cup, and standing, said: “I am king of Cos and Colchis, I have twelve cities on the Atlantean sea-coast, two hundred galleys, ten palaces at the foot of the mountains of Kaf, a hundred thousand warriors, a hundred thousand slaves, fifty thousand war chariots, three hundred concubines, forty golden vessels. I am renowned for my worth. I desire to obtain the hand of the daughter of the king of kings. She will be treated as her rank requires, and I will have for her the respect due to her who shares my royal bed. I say this now.” As was his custom he we threw his cup full of ruddy wine on the tablecloth and sat down again.

Arhimaz stood up in turn: “I need not boast of my ancestors, my courage, my riches, and ahem... my beauty. Mithras will lavish riches on me. I will only say that my land is so near to that of the Atlanteans, that the Ziris could make it a single kingdom by choosing me for her husband.”

Kais then spoke: “Erm... the Ombos are the greatest warriors on earth and I command them. My vast states, my cities, my subjects, and my elephants may be yours, beautiful girl.”

He took up his cup and in doing so splashed King Surtur, who cried out “The king of the Ombos is, without a doubt, even more clumsy than his mammoths!” The girls of the court softly suppressed their chuckles.

At each request, Satourann had nodded his head in approval and stroked his beard, questioning his daughter’s impassive face with his eyes.

Then Thor asked for the cup and said: “It is not the custom among us to spread wine. This is an insult to the god of the vine and ruins good cloth.” He continued after a sidelong glance at Surtur. “King of the tribes of the moon and the sun,” he continued, “give me your daughter for a wife. I have a love for her as big as the heavens and I suit her better

than all these pretenders". The suitors hemmed and looked disgruntled, but felt to burning sense of competition with such a brute.

Nevertheless, Surtur, angry at having been splashed, emptied his own cup in one gulp and shouted: "You are neither king nor prince, do you dare to press for the hand of the daughter of Satourann!"

"I am a free man" replied Thor, which for him was answer enough.

"And how many chariots and flocks have you, for these I hear are 'wealth' for you nomads?"

"I have neither wagons nor flocks of my own; but I have the confidence of the forty thousand horsemen, and at my sign they will fly to battle. The offense against a Scythian is looked at as done to the whole nation. Forty thousand barbarians armed for battle..."

"Horses, stones and pebbles are not a nation," cut in King Surtur, jingling his earrings, and laughed with contempt.

"Son of a dog," cried Nemeith, rising erect in his seat, "Thor is my friend, and I command fifty thousand cocks no less tall and all no less red than myself."

Hu-gadarn spoke in support of his friend Nemeith: "When the Scythian horses and Nemeith cocks march to battle, the bears of my tribe growl for their share of blood."

"And my eagles," said young Herser his cousin, "could put out the eyes of the crocodiles of Cos and rend the ears of the elephants."

Thor's request to speak had at first made the King of Kings smile; but in the face of the unanimity and agreement of the Scythians, he felt he must take it into consideration. He then struck the table with his sceptre of

solid gold, to put an end to the taunts and provocations which the guests were throwing at each other, obtained a little silence, and said to Thor:

“Son of the shining horse, I admit you to the number of my daughter’s suitors.”

He lifted up his cup, drank to the Scythians, to the Atlanteans, to peace and friendship, and then, turning to his daughter, said, “May Ahura Mazda enlighten your judgment.”

The wines were circulated. The maids of honour brought on behalf of Ziris to the suitors, to the Kuretes, to the Scythian visitors, and to the most important people of the court, presents hidden in baskets of palm leaves, covered with fine white linen. The wedding ring was in just one, that would be given to the chosen suitor.

“I cannot,” she said, addressing herself to all, “give you either racing anoplotheres with nimble feet, nor golden-saddled mammoths, nor formidable warriors; but I wish, in memory of this great day, to offer each of my suitors a mark of esteem, gratitude or benevolence.

“Your own attractions, O Ziris, surpass the highest mountains” said Arhimaz with poetic simplicity.

Surtur, quickly outbidding with his praise, added a formulaic: “Your cheeks are more beautiful than the purple of Cos, your hips are as supple as the branches of the willow, and your eyes are as bright as two quivers full of arrows.”

“Erm... your shoulders are like two rivers of milk?” said Kais, blinking. “Your nose glows... like the sun?” At which another round of soft girlish tittering suffused the court.

Thor already rejoiced in their disappointment. He had no doubt that Ziris had chosen him. He lifted the linen cloth with a light heart and

then he fingered his double-edged iron axe. There was nothing more to say. There was no ring in the basket, and he must fight them all here and now. The pale Scythian stood and his brawny bulk brandished the weapon in triumph: “Daughter of a king, you could not have given a better gift to a man, to battle and win for you... and I understand your wish.”

“What did you understand?” asked Ziris, alarmed. Then, addressing Nemeith urgently: “What are you waiting for, to show us?”

Nemeith had long since skilfully slipped his hand under the linen, and had found the one ring there. He had blushed with joy. Without having asked for anything, he prevailed over all of them. And then he had turned pale with grief at the thought of the pain his friend Thor would feel. He swiftly hid the ring in his leather belt, intending to later return it to Ziris and make her understand that she had to give it to Thor.

Then the king of Cos discovered his empty basket. Ziris was trembling with anger, and her cheeks were whiter than her tunic of swan feathers.

Nemeith pretended to search around him and on the ground for Thor’s fallen ring; Thor looked at him suspiciously. “Why does she play games with me?” asked Thor of his friend.

“Ask the wind that blows through girls’ heads” came the reply from under the table.

Satourann, believing that no suitor had been chosen, and irritated at seeing himself played by his daughter, made his own choice and said in a loud voice:

“Let the bride turn her eyes, clear-sighted like those of the sweet dawn, to the greatest and most powerful prince after me, the king of Cos.”

The black King Surtur straightened up, casting a look of contempt at his rivals, and was about to leap like a tiger towards the white Ziris, when Nemeith jumped into the middle of the table, took him by the hair, and held him under him. "Thor! If you are a man," he cried, "go and obtain the hand of the Ziris."

The Scythian ran to Ziris; but before he could join her, the battle he anticipated began.

Surtur, endowed with a strength equal to that of Nemeith, had risen to his feet, throwing what had fallen into his hand, a golden vessel, at the head of his enemy.

The latter with the handle of his axe pushes the projectile aside, which bounces in Arhimaz's face who promptly cried "Death and vengeance!" as "Blood! Blood!" shouted the Etheopians with horse's manes and "To the hair!" shouted the Scythians.

The girls fled; the tables were overturned; Kais disappears under the debris of the feast and popped up in the middle of a tight ring of his mammoths. Thor wished simply to carry off the Ziris and jump on a horse; but was confronted with the iron hammers of the Cyclops workers protecting their divinity. Nemeith, Herser, Og rushed at Surtur's archers, striking hard and singing amid spurts of blood; Hu-gadarn cut off the trunk of a mammoth as he sought a way through them; Kind Satourann threw himself into the fray to restore order; his voice muffled by the tumult. Soon he was forced to use his golden sceptre as a cudgel. Surtur and Arhimaz retreated; taking refuge behind the beds of the gods. The gods remained strangely indifferent. The cataphracts and pharetrats and grandees of the palace hastened to Satourann, while the scholars and scientists scuttled for the servants hall.

The arrows were flying, and more than one head was already split, when an old man, dressed in white, with a golden headband on his

forehead, entered the hall and in a thundering voice ordered, in the name of the god of light and justice, that their arms should be laid down. He invoked Ptah and Mithras for some, friendship and Heimdall for others. He blamed, he shouted, he threatened, and all stopped. His majestic size, his long white beard, his bald head, his gaze imposed on everyone who remained alive.

"Satourann," said he, "dare you, in the presence of the images of the gods, let blood be shed on a feast day, on a day like this? And you, Scythian peoples, do you think that you are pleasing the god-father by disregarding the duties of hospitality? Is this an engagement worthy of Ziris? Take care that the great God does not be moved by all this and destroy forever all that he has created. Great calamities are being prepared, and it is not by persevering in evil that you will turn away the wrath of heaven. Repent, love one another, be generous, and know how to forgive injuries; obey, I will ask mercy for your crimes and save you from destruction."

This man was of course the magician Xizouthros. Ziris, who had once heard him speak, recognized the voice of Mithras' lair.

"O you," she said, "who by the power of your word have caused the anger of these men to fall, remind the king my father that he must not seek to force my will in the choice of a husband."

Xizouthros blamed the king, accused him of having been the cause of the bloodshed by his precipitation in forcing the issue. It was resolved to delay the choice of a successor to the throne. Saturann emptied his cup for the last time in honour of his hosts, allies, and subjects. All withdrew.

Chapter X

Ziris, re-entering the interior of the palace, left her finery in the midst of her chamber-maids, who would not have helped her to undress for all the treasures of the king her father. It was customary for them to stand there and watch. She sent them away. As soon as the heavy cedar door slipped into its groove, she dropped onto her down cushions and burst into tears.

The moon shone in the depths of the sky, and its rays played on the pearly flagstones of the room. Ziris ran to the platform of the window, and, addressing the star, said:

"Goddess Manah, eye of the night, be the confidante of my sorrow; see my tears, O Manah; protect me from the goddess Bala, who breathes violence into my heart and tells me to call down the wrath of Ptah on this red-haired rooster Devil. His venomous teeth poured poison into my whole being. By refusing my hand, he greatly offended me, and I hate him now. Why did he keep my engagement ring? Does he want to use it to compose some curse? What is to be done, O divine Manah? I don't want him dead, though. Help me: go and visit him. Let him give me back my pledge: that I may take revenge, ill-treat him, laugh at his torments, and show him the preference I wish to give to his black-haired friend Thor."

After venting her anger, she returned to her bed and was a long time before she could find sleep. She fell asleep, however; but she dreamed that the red haired man was carrying her through space, and that his lips were burning her lips.

Then she saw herself cradling a child with fiery hair.

She awoke, and fancied she saw, in the flickering light of the sacred fire burning in a tripod, the bas-reliefs of the wall stirring. The winged lions threatened her with their open mouths, from which stems of flowers

protruded. The bulls with triple horns and human faces that flanked the door rolled their enamel eyes. The golden serpents glided along the stone palms that waved their bronze foliage. She put her hand on her heart to supress its beating, wanted to cry out, could not and fell back crushed on her bed.

CHAPTER XI

After the disastrous betrothal meal, just as Nemeith was leaving the palace, the golden-breasted gem-swallower Mouza approached him.

"I offer you... hospitality," she said. Nemeith agreed.

She made him ride by her side in a palanquin decorated with bouquets of ostrich feathers and carried by bearers. Nemeith enjoyed this way of travelling, but he despised the porters who wobbled and pitched. They reached the palace of Kayo-Marath, located on the slopes of a hill covered with mastic trees, cacti and aloes. The gardens were surrounded by deep ditches to prevent the entrance from the Harpis, bands of criminals who often came down from the Atlai to ransom the inhabitants of the plain.

The corpse of one of them was nailed to the main door, between a wolf and a bat. The Atlanteans hung up the bad dead beasts in this way, to warn the living of the fate that awaited them.

Two servants took Nemeith away, and after stripping him of his leather garments, washed and perfumed, they put on a purple robe, put on the master's sandals, and brought him to the cook-wife of the Kuret.

She was waiting for him before a table covered with flowers, fruit, and steaming dishes in gold or silver vases. Although he had eaten and drunk extensively at Satourann's meal, he wished to respond to the honours paid him by his hostess. He drank and ate again, so that at the

end of the supper. Mouza was tall and beautiful, and her fiery eyes had softened for Nemeith. He laughed at the thought that the jewels of the diadem and the belts of the couschite had passed through her gullet.

The room swam before him, and he returned to Mouza all the caresses she desired. The door opened, and Kayo-Marath entered abruptly. He was amazed at the sight of Nemeith in his clothes, drinking his wine and 'celebrating' his wife. His wife uttered a cry of fright, but recovered rather quickly.

Nemeith was angry that someone had entered without his permission. "I am welcome here, to use the home as my own," replied the man with the bull's horns, drunkenly, "and this woman is mine."

Mouza said submissively: "If it is wrong to have offered hospitality to a stranger, I am guilty." Then, approaching her husband, she said to him in a low voice: "His fox-skin purse is full of jewels".

"Ah, then you must have them," replied the Kuret, suddenly softened. And, turning to Nemeith: "Welcome to my home. Be assured you may eat and drink at your ease."

"I've eaten and drunk, I'm sleepy."

"Mouza, water for our host; I want him to look upon my house, my servants, as his own.

"And your wife?"

"You will want for nothing!"

And Kayo-Marath brought back wine from Eleuzine and spices. Nemeith fell asleep with his head on the table. Mouza got up, made sure he was asleep, and told her husband to follow her. "The accursed dog, how he sleeps!" he said, drawing his sword. He raised his arm to

strike him when his wife held him back: “You would not have the strength to do so; he would wake up, and farewell to precious stones. Leave this care to my servant Kedar.”

They went out, taking the light with them. Nemeith snored like a lion. A moment later, while the two spouses were eagerly plunging their hands into the barbarian’s purse, Kedar the black, provided with a garrotting string and followed by three others, approached the sleeper noiselessly. Kedar passed his noose around the neck in the trembling light of a lamp and tightened. But the abundant hair of the victim resisted and thwarts the trap. Nemeith, believing himself still in the arms of a comely girl, awoke and said, “Do you love me to the point of strangling me?” But he quickly understood when he saw the three negroes armed with knives.

With a side-blow of his fist he knocked down Kedar, and, making himself a weapon of the table, he struck relentlessly. The one who carried the lamp fell, the other two fled. He pursued them and smacked their heads against hard stone, then caught up with Kedar. Clasping his neck with his terrible hand he hissed: ““You will make me find my clothes and my weapons, or, in the darkness of this night, you will have finished living.” Kudar obeyed.

Believing that Kayo-Marath had perhaps wished to avenge his honour, and feeling himself in the wrong, he did not seek revenge. He put on his clothes and was preparing to depart when Mouza, his face flooded with tears, presented himself before him.

“I am not guilty,” she said, “I wanted to cry out to wake you; but I was dragged away by my offended husband. I have just escaped from him to tell you to flee. He returns with all his servants. He wants you dead.”

“I believe that it is not your fault; but if ever the horned head of your husband falls into my hands, I will make you a present of his scalp.”

And Nemeith went out without hurrying, crossed the garden, crossed the ditch, and gained the countryside. The stars told him which direction he should go, and he was some way off when he realised that he had forgotten his fox skin bag and its gems. He wanted to go back and get them; but he told himself that it was not worth it, and thought that of course Mouza would send them back to him.

As he was walking along the path of the carob trees that led to the city, he saw a tall, beautiful girl coming in the moonlight, with a bundle on her head.

"Do not be afraid" he cried, "I am not a Harpi."

"I am. Go your way!" she answered, looking at him with eyes that shone in the darkness like those of wild beasts, and showing him sharp teeth like those of sharks.

"You walk late at night", observed Nemeith.

"The sun hurts my eyes."

"What do you carry there that is so precious?"

"A dead child."

"Yours?"

"Gorgo is a virgin," she said, raising her head.

"And what do you want to do with this corpse?"

"What does it matter to you?

"Let him who sees all keep you, beautiful girl!"

“May Rabah, with the jaws of a crocodile, preserve you!”

She took up her bloody package, cut across the fields, and disappeared.

Chapter XII

The second day of the Mihragan festivals was dedicated to foot and chariot races as well as public games. The population went to a vast cirque with tiers and turf embankments. The seats reserved for the court were of brick, the galleries of wood; but those of the sacred Ziris, the king and his Kuretes, were covered with carpets and tents. The arena was divided by a very low wall decorated with obelisks, statues, and prizes to be won.

The tumult of the day before, at the betrothal meal, had cooled the king of kings for his friends the Scythians; but he did not wish to show his resentment. The Scythian nation was valiant and numerous; it had to be spared. He therefore offered his representatives a place with him; all agreed, except Nemeith, who preferred to stay away from Ziris.

The latter gave the signal for the games by throwing an apple from the land of the Hesperides into the middle of the arena.

Satourann threw clothes, shoes, caps and small objects to the serfs. Men, women and children rush screaming. They pushed and hit each other to collect the king’s presents, to the great bursts of laughter of the men of freer condition. The trumpets sound, the guards evacuate the circus, and this time Satourann throws cups, metal bottles, cutlasses, full salt cellars and fine belts. Free men rush forward in their turn, and quarrel no less fiercely than slaves.

The king then distributes necklaces, bracelets, rings and earrings to his courtiers; then he raises his sceptre, the barriers open, and thirty charioteers come and line up in a single line. First of all, there is the king

of Cos, renowned for his skill in driving a quadriga; Arhimaz, who puts all his confidence in his light anoplothers; Kais, who claims that his horses have never been outpaced. Then Bel, the pharetrate, son of Bolkai, and other young warriors of Atlantis. Kedar, now revealed as the black champion of Kayo-Marath, on a charioteer, decorated with a bull's head, causes discord among the runners. None of them will let him compete for the prize. The black deviously pretends to struggle to obey his masters; King Surtur spits in his face and drags him under the feet of his horses. Kayo-Marath demands the intervention of Satourann.

"I cannot now offend the enraged King of Cos." the King wheedled. "If your man survives, he will receive twenty-five lashes with a thong."

Then a new dispute arose about the anoplothers: they could not compete, for they were not horses. Arhimaz gets angry, threatens, but goes back to the stables with his team.

But the starting flag is raised and the charioteers rush into the arena, until a whirlwind of dust hides them from all eyes. Kais and Bel soon surpass all the others; but as he turned the boundary, one of the horses of Kais fell. The king of the elephants rolls in the dust and entangled himself in his guide trains; King Surtur taunts him as he passes. Bel pushes his fiery horses and arrives first at the goal. He jumps lightly to the ground and runs to greet Ziris and the king who awards him the gold. Bel looked at Ziris, who deigned to smile at him. Bel carried the memory of that smile in his heart, always.

Then the trumpets sounded and the runners introduce themselves. The prize to be disputed is a bronze tripod. Among the competitors is the runner Ized. His entry into the race was greeted with frenzied acclamations, especially by a group of women who wore a gold star on their foreheads. They belonged to the caste of the Peris, a caste very numerous at Sisparis, and in no way despised by the Atlanteans. They worshipped Gahi, the genie of impurity, in the form of the planet Venus. They had placed bets on Ized, who had never been defeated in a race.

He was a pretty boy, thin from the sides, broad of the chest, with a stiff skin, and curly hair. A steel circle adorned with three red feathers encircled his forehead. His short tunic showed his supple arms, his beautiful shoulders, and his legs nervous like those of a young girl.

During the chariot race, Nemeith was tempted to enter the fray, but he had neither horses nor charioteer, and had to remain a spectator. When he saw that his legs could do for him. Intent of achieving victory, he leaped into the arena. He was received with an explosion of boos.

"Will you fight with me for speed?" Ized asked him.

"I want to try it."

"I run past the deer. And even the arrows," Ized said to him, laughing with contempt. "Your red plume will drag in the air and make you fall. Only if you want to ride on my back, then you'll arrive at the same time as me."

The king gave the signal. Ized soon surpassed all men. It was a question of going around the circus three times. Nemeith was far behind, and the spectators, not content with booing him for entering the arena, threw the peels and stones of the fruit they ate at him. On the third lap, Nemeith, who had taken it easy, overtook and tripled in speed, reached the goal with the rapidity of lightning. The contempt of the crowd changed into admiration, and all wished to have bet for him.

Ized, panting, covered in dust, was exasperated. He pretended that the interloper had no right to run; the others vanquished took her side; but the spectators acclaimed Nemeith. Ized lay down in the sun along the fences and wept with rage.

Nemeith went to her and said: "Wipe away your tears, and despise no more so much the legs of the golden-haired." And he went to fetch the tripod.

As he crossed the stands, he almost stepped on Mouza.

“Oh have you found my purse at home?” he asked.

“The purse, yes, but not the gems,” came the slick reply. “I had my servants tortured to find out who had stolen them.”

“Whip your belly, it will give them back.” said a knowing voice from the nearby crowd. The girls and women of the race began to laugh, and the King himself heard and had difficulty in preserving his dignity.

Nemeith went to take the tripod and took it away with one arm, although it was heavy.

As he passed under the platform of Ziris, she called down to him, and showing him a necklace of wolf’s teeth: “Red!” she said, “take this.” And she threw him at her feet. Sending a wild beast’s tooth was equivalent to a declaration of war.

“Is that what you forgot to give me yesterday?” he said sadly, adorning himself with the necklace.

Ziris darted her large black eyes at him and called him in a low voice: “Angramanyou”.

The doors of the circus are opened, and elephants, rhinoceroses, tigers, lions, wild bulls are released into the enclosure. The place filled with a tremendous concert of roars, shouts and bellows. The ferocious beasts attack, bite, disembowel and tear each other apart with fury. The Atlanteans had a passion for this kind of spectacle. Two tigers broke through the palisades and brought death to several spectators.

The same feeling of vengeance took possession of the assembly; all rushed into the arena and used moveable wooden panels to crush rather

than fight the animals that remained. The corpses were carried away and the warriors of the king of Cos, the anoplotheres of Arhimaz and the mammoths of Kais were paraded before the people through the blood.

Satourann wished by this exhibition to flatter the pride of the Atlanteans, and to show them how great was the power of him who received such gifts. But the glamorous wives, taking more interest in Nemeith than in the elephants, admired his masculine presence and extolled his generosity.

“I have palm wine,” replied one fat Purucha, drawing him to herself.

“Come to my villa,” said Civa, taking him by the arm.

“That’s enough praise for a day,” he said; we had better go drink.”

Come and celebrate,” said Azo in her turn, hanging from his neck.

And all of them competed for the beautiful rider.

“I cannot go to all of your homes at once; but we can all go to one”. So it was agreed that they should buy and roast two sheep, some wine, and go to Civa’s, who was the best lodged.

And Nemeith, making a megaphone with his hands, then hailed his companions as if he had been alone and in the steppes.

Hu-gadarn, Og, and cousin Herser were soon near him, while the wives, raising their fine draperies and making their metal rings resound, descended the steps of grass. Confident, impudent, and haughty, pushing and offending everybody, they almost dragged the Scythians behind them.

Chapter XIII

On returning from the games of the circus, Satourann sent for the king of Cos to come to his Gynaecium and drink with him the *homa*, a liquor of Asclepias which made man like the gods. It was a great honour. At the sixth cup, Satourann had promised Surtur that he alone would be his son-in-law, and, not wishing to lose time, he asked for an audience with his daughter, and the wish was granted.

When Satourann and Ziris were alone in the high Hall of The Stars, he said: "You have received the requests of the three princes, my allies, and has not yet made your choice known. The Mirhagan festivities end to-morrow, and, although I have consented to a delay of two moons, I cannot let my allies go without giving at least one hope to one of them."

Ziris, after a long silence, replied: "I choose Thor, the Scythian. Surtur the black is vile and will never have my engagement ring."

"By the mighty towers of heaven! You will be queen of Cos. May the earth, around which the deep seas flow, fail under my feet if this happens! This Thor is not a husband worthy of the daughter of the king of kings. I have had to promise you to the king of Cos!"

"O king my father, did Ahura Mazda struck you with madness to dare to speak thus to the high priestess of Ptah?"

"Ptah is a blind force, a slave of Mithras," he replied "Let the ignorant people adore him, so be it! But the real god of Atlantis is me, the king! I will, I command Surtur to be your husband. To-morrow, I proclaimed, and without waiting for an answer, he left his daughter aghast.

It was the first time that the Ziris had seen her will ignored. Then turning to the image of Ptah, whose head with formidable horns touches the vault, she raised her head, and, looking at the colossal statue of

Mithras, she asks him to protect it and to manifest his will. Mithras seemed deaf to the prayer.

“Since you abandon me,” she cried, “I will leave your worship, I will go in search of unknown gods.” I will implore this god of the Scythians. I swear by the bright stars of the deep firmament! If you are god, speak! Claim your fiancee whom men want to snatch from you. Help me to flee Surtur. I have no confidence in anyone but you. Do not be jealous of that red which my mother had seen in a dream hovering over Atanor. I hate him. Speak, O light of the night, god of the bowels of the earth, answer me. But Ptah too was silent.

“Daughter of the Cyclops,” she said to her maid-servant, “come with me”. She left the hall to flee from the palace; but the king had been suspicious of such resistance. The exits were guarded. When she returned to the courtyard of the lemon trees, she saw Hanaid her maid-servant crying. Around her, the swans were sleeping; two snakes chased each other in a moonbeam.

Ziris took off her bracelets and her gold breastplate, her jewelled necklaces, and all her valuables, throwing them on the maid-servants’s knees. “I know. I am held here a prisoner against all the laws. I want to go to Thor and flee to Scythia. All this is yours, if you help me out of the palace. The Scythian defies death. So will I, I will leap from a high tower if needs be”.

“I cannot, Ziris” cried Hanaid, throwing himself on his knees, “He is my betrothed, and the gods want him to be my husband.”

“The gods?” cried Ziris, shrugging his shoulders; they are deaf to the unfortunate ones.

Hanaid was terrified: “Don’t attract their wrath, and leave me the one I love.”

“Obey me, and we shall see.”

“I will obey.”

“At this hour, there are no more Cyclops hammer-men in the forge?”

“No, Ziris.”

“Are there weapons of war, clothes?”

“Yes, Ziris.”

Ziris took a box, took out powders of different colors, and, with the help of a reed, painted on her face the three heads of the bull of the Pharetrates.

When this was done, and Hanaid, in obedience to her, had imitated her, she said: “Let us go and get some weapons,” she said. The two girls descended the dark secret stairs and corridors through which Hanaid had already led Thor. They entered the darkened forge, threw off their veils, and girded over their tunics with feather-coats of iron mail, crowned themselves with helmets with flowing manes and armed themselves with swords and shields. Thus disguised, they made their way to the gates of the palace, and passed boldly before a sentinel, who took them in the darkness of the night for two of his own.

“Companions,” said he, “if you are of the cohort that is about to take possession of the Scythian, you are too late. He is gone and the bridges are raised.”

Hanaid, frightened, asked in a deeper voice: “What do we want from the Scythian?”

“To kill him!” replied the soldier.

“Who gave such an order?”

“The King of Cos.”

They nodded stiffly and moved away. Hanaid, thinking only of warning the one she loved, if there was still time, hastened her pace.

“Since the exits are closed, how can we get out?” whispered Ziris.

“By the gardens, perhaps.” But when they got there, they realized that the garden walls were too high to get over. Hanaid found a breach. and they ran to it; but it only plunged steeply into a wide and deep ditch. Both leaning over the edge, they tried to see in the moonlight whether some projections of the escarpment would not allow them to risk it. Then the splashing of a boat made them listen. They hid themselves. The boat stopped in the middle of the ditch. At the same moment they heard a footstep not far from them. A woman, wrapped in long dark veils, came out of the thicket and gained the wall; it was Mouza. “Kedar,” she said in a low voice, “are you there?” “Yes,” replied the black.

“Approach,” replied the Mouza, tying a rope to a branch in the water.

“Approach, then, I cannot descend, my back is whipped raw.”

“You’ll get it, you brute beast. Take the end of the damn rope.”

“Mouza! you let me give twenty-five lashes to-day, yesterday I was nearly strangled for your pleasure. I want compensation. I am willing to lie with you again, on condition that you will give me your earrings.”

There was a reluctant grunt of acceptance from the boat. The sly negro was in an instant on the top of the wall.

“Come, star of my nights,” he said softly to the adulterous wife, when little Hanaid threw himself on the man, crying, “Death!”

Kedar was frightened, his foot slipped and he disappeared in the ditch. Mouza wanted to call, but the Cyclops’ daughter struck her in the face with her sword; she fell.

“Did you kill her?” asked Ziris.

“Death alone knows; come down quickly, or the boat won’t hold”.

The daughter of Satourann let herself slide along the rope, reached the boat; Hanaid followed her and pushed off. When they landed on the other bank, they glimpsed Kedar trying to swim around the wall.

Wishing to join Thor, who was to be at Bolkai’s, they cut across the fields. They jumped over fences, and crossed hedges of aloes with sharp points, which would have pierced them without their armour. Presently they found a path and shortly after they heard a great noise rising from the palace. Then the sound of a troop marching, the clanking of arms, the rolling of chariots, and finally the breath and whiney of horses. The alarm was given. They left the well-trodden paths and ran on through the heather and hedgerows.

They ran until Ziris, panting, exhausted with unaccustomed fatigue, let herself fall on soft moss. “I will go no further,” she said.

“Catch your breath, and let us quickly gain my father’s house.”

“I cannot. Go and tell the Scythian to... come and fetch me... and I will wait for you here. I have nothing to fear... have I not a talisman that preserves against death? and yet I die, I suffocate...”

She fainted.

Hanaid dared not touch her to help her, nor call for her help. She was not to abandon the sacred daughter; however, she left, wishing to save Thor from the danger that threatened him. Love prevailed over duty.

She arrived at Bolkai's house; but before the servants were awake, and the gates were not opened to her. She lost precious time. Then she had to explain to her father, her brother, and Thor why she had come armed in the middle of the night to tell the Scythian to run away.

"Your betrothed has nothing to fear in my house, he is my guest," he father said. "My son and I will be killed before we touch a hair of his head. Let him stay here, and I will go to the Ziris and persuade her to return to the palace."

Thor shrugged his shoulders and seizing Hanaid, said "Lead me to Ziris."

Chapter XIV

They came to the place where Hanaid had left Ziris fainting; she was no longer there. Ziris, who had come to herself and was terrified at seeing herself alone so far from the city, had not dared call out. But a joyful song was heard in the silence of the night. The singer came closer. Ziris soon recognized the voice of the golden-haired rooster. Although she had sworn a mortal hatred for him, she called him by invoking what the Scythians esteemed most in the world: friendship.

"By the wind of the steppes! who speaks of a friendship weightier than the mountains of Kaf?"

"Come closer, and you will know."

Nemeith, whose brain was a little troubled by the ample victory libations, went to her side, and took her for a soldier: "Young warrior,"

he said, “you will have drunk too much, and the wine of Atlantis is heavy to bear, even for Scythians. Since sunset, we have not stopped drinking and singing with the most beautiful ladies of Sisparis. But if you want to go and take you soldier’s duty-place for now.”

Ziris did not listen to him. “Run away,” she said to him.

“Can’t you walk? Are you sick? I’m going to take you away.”

“Don’t touch me!”

“I give it to you straight, I have had enough fooling: I am leaving. But first, are you injured?”

Ziris didn’t answer.

“If you wish to die here, I will leave you,” replied Nemeith.

“And what will you bring back here?” she asked. A sentinel of Satourann? By the star Hesper! I am in for some punishment.” She tried to get up, but fell back.

Nemeith did not listen to her and carried the disguided ‘boy’ back to the house of celebrations. As he lifted her from the ground, Nemeith thought he felt the ground quivering beneath his feet, and heard the rumbling of lightning in the distance. He thought it was a dream and attributed it to drunkenness. But he was soon in front of the house of Civa. He called; bare feet slammed on the flagstones, and Civa, scarcely dressed, let him in. The floor of the hallway was strewn with empty bottles, overturned cups, broken dishes, and the debris of victuals. The Scythians and the Peris snored in wine. The servants had departed, deciding it better to sleep under the hedges until morning. Only Ized the runner was awake, nursing his loss with a bottle in a dark corner.

Thus it was in the midst of these ladies dedicated to the worship of Gahi, that the sacred daughter of the king of kings, was to be found slumped, in masculine garb. Nemeith took off his helmet, found with great difficulty a little water, and, to recall his sorry companion to life, he bathed his eyes and forehead; then, fearing that he was dead, he laid his hand on his heart.

"She is a woman!" he cried.

"Take me away!" she replied in a faint voice. And then she fainted again.

"A woman!" said Civa, approaching her torch of Ziris's face.

"Wind and thunder!" said Nemeith, "it is the Ziris! She is as if dead!"

Civa fled to the other end of the room, and, wringing her hands:
"Awaken her! your sacrilege will bring misfortune upon my house. Take it away, since you dare to touch it. Listen, listen! Thunder rumbles. There is blood in the air. Vat'en!"

Purusha and Azo, their eyes puffed up with fatigue, awoke at Civa's cries, did not understand, but cried out all the louder. "Peace,!" said Nemeith, in a formidable voice; "Go outside and howl at the moon and let this girl sleep." The ladies fled drunkenly into the garden.

Ziris opened her eyes, looked around her without understanding, thought herself the prey of a dream, and let her head fall on the shoulder of Nemeith.

Thor and Hanaid, who, followed by Bolkai and Bel, were looking for Ziris, were attracted by all the wailing and noise and entered at that moment. The first impulse of the Scythian, on seeing the woman he loved in the care of his friend, was to tear her from him. But he put his hand on her and woke her.

A clap of thunder rang out and lightning fell on the house.

Ziris, terrified, pressed herself against Nemeith. Hu-gadarn, Herser, and Og, awakened from stupor by the explosion, rubbed their eyes and asked if they were going to fight.

“Yes,” replied Thor; “to the wagons! Satourann and the whole Atlantean nation are on a campaign to retake Ziris, and they will follow us into Scythia”.

The barbarians shook themselves, adjusted their boots, and then ran unsteadily to fetch the horses. Thor approached Ziris, eyes blazing with victory.

“Don’t touch me! I’m Ziris!”

“I am not troubled by your foolish customs; you are a woman whom I love and whose love I wish to be loved.”

Hanaid, followed by her father and brother, entered at that moment.

“Thor!” cried Bel, putting his sword in his hand, “think of my sister, your betrothed, and leave her princess to return to her people.”

Thor replied, pushing him away. “Do you think you can prevent what I have resolved on?”

Bel threw himself to meet him by raising his axe.

“Get out of my way,” replied the Scythian.

“He’s my brother!” Hanaid cried, throwing himself on his knees.

“Bel! He is your guest and mine,” roared the Cyclops to his son.

Bel let out a cry of rage and pain and sank back on himself. Yer, determined to do his duty to the end he pricked the Scythian with his sword. Thor roared like a wounded lion, jumped on the Atlantean and with a single blow split his head open.

Bolkai raised his forge hammer against the murderer of his son; Nemeith snatched it from him.

"This is wrong, very bad," said Ziris, looking at Thor.

"Here is the enemy!" Hu-gadarn shouted from outside. Thor seized Ziris and disappeared as fast as a tiger.

Bolkai pushed his daughter away, who was clinging to Bel's corpse. "It is for me," said he, "to give your brother a burial." And addressing Nemeith, "This young girl has been dedicated from her childhood to the service of the Ziris, her duty is to follow her; I entrust her to you: watch over her if you are a man.

"She will be as my sister or my wife," replied Nemeith, nodding. And he prepared to drag her with him. Then, seeing Ized the runner in a dark corner, he called out: "You who must know all the roads, lead us, and I promise you whatever you want."

"Ah, my fast friend. I accept your promise; follow me, you who know how to run so well."

They crossed into a nearby wood, just as the sentinels and the royal maid-servants invaded the dwelling of Civa.

Chapter X

The wife of the Kuret, struck in the face by the young Atlantean, had fallen, blinded by her blood. But she had recognized the voice of Hanaid, and heard the name of the Ziris. Endowed with great strength of will, she overcame her suffering, and, with the help of Kedar, she returned to the palace.

She went at once to consult her copper mirror. His wound was horrible: the forehead, eyebrow, and cheek were separated.

"I will take my revenge. Misfortune! thrice woe to your head, Hanaid! Be cursed in all your actions, in your father, in your brother, in your betrothed, in your friends, in your house! May Angramanyou help me! I make a covenant with you, evil Rackazas; Bala, goddess of violence. Help me to destroy the daughter of the Cyclops; I want to savor her death, slow and painful. I swear, by the tomb of Osiris from the rocks of Philea," she said, "that she who has disfigured me forever will die, and that no one, not even Ziris, will prevent me from having Kedar lie with me again.

She looked at herself one last time, and with both her feet she stamped her feet and wrecked the mirror. She then ran to the council chamber. Seizing a hammer, she struck the gong, which was only used on solemn occasions to give the alarm. The inhabitants of the palace were soon on their feet. The room was full and Mouza was still hitting. She saw on all faces the horror inspired by her wound; she redoubled her rage. Her husband wanted to stop her.

Satourann, believing an attack, hastened sword in hand.

Mouza, addressing him; "Let the king come!" she said, "King of the Atlanteans, for Ziris is on the run. May the terrible Ptah not lay the blame of the daughter on the father. I tried to oppose her departure, but I failed. I could not lay a hand on her, but I wanted to hold back the one

who helped her in her fatal design. Hanaid treacherously hit me in the face, Hanaid deserves death or worse".

"May Mithras refuse me the light for ever!" cried the king; "Yes, the Cyclops' daughter is guilty, and her father will punish her, I promise you. But above all, we have to bring back the Ziris. She cannot be far away.

Then, turning to the suitors, he said: "King Surtur, you will follow me; Remember that my daughter is your fiancee still. Arhimaz, Kais, lend me a hand, good lads. Kayo-Marath, faithful advisor, you must have the city searched. Whoever finds the Ziris will have known how to please the gods, and my generosity will not fail him. My chariots! my sentinels!"

"King, my father-in-law," said Surtur, "I believe that your daughter must have gone to the Scythian; but let Savitri send me impotence if I do not bring her back before daylight. I have already given gold coins for the barbarian to be put to death.

"It will be war with Scythia," observed Saturann.

"I have a hundred thousand warriors," replied the king.

The two rejected suitors retired in silence. When they were on the staircase of a hundred steps they spoke together. "By the divine Adityas who deliver from evil!" said Arhimaz, "I will not disturb my men to run after another's wife."

Kais responded: "By the cows of the Nile! I swear that I will not move a finger, and I am so dissatisfied with Satourann's reception that I take my mammoths back."

"So be it," replied the short-sighted Kais, "Look, join me and we will get rid of them afterwards and draw lots for the princess. Let

Angramanyou eat me, if I do not immediately set out on the campaign to join the Scythians and lend them a hand."

And the two princes separated and went to their men.

The king of Cos meanwhile had set out without waiting for Saturann, to join the cohort which he had sent to the Cyclops hammer-men, and which was to seize Thor. Believing that he already had the Scythian, he was seeking in his mind, rich in cruelties, what kind of torture he would inflict on his rival, when he overtook his vanguard. They had gone astray on the wide plain. He rallied to it and marched on Bolkai's house. The servants were routed out of the nearby hedges and informed him that their master had been heard going down the lanes with the Scythian.

Mouza arrived in the meantime, with her negro lover Kedar. She was looking for Hanaid to kill her and yet only found King Surtur, who was beside himself with rage that his enemy had escaped. The King remembered the hospitality offered to the Scythians by Civa, and that they all went to her house. By order of the king of Cos, the soldiers were then told to slay all in the house. They defended themselves valiantly. Civa broke a jug over the head of a sentinel while Azo writhed under the bronzed hands of two Ethiopians. The fat Purusha made herself a rampart of a table and threw everything within her reach at the enemy; but, overwhelmed by numbers, all but the fat Purusha were stripped of all clothing, then bound and hung by the neck from the trees in the garden. The king leered and dragged fat Purusha away.

Kayo-Marath's wife Mouza was afraid of these madmen and ran away.

After finishing with Purusha he came out of the bedroom. "Now set fire to the house," the black King shouted wildly to his men: "we will see more clearly to find them!" He was obeyed with joy, and soon a column of flames rose into the black sky.

Chapter XVI

A band of purple streaked the horizon, when the smallest of the King's scouts, perched in a high spying point on the top of a tree, cried out that he saw the fur-lined caps of the Scythians at ten arrow's lengths. Surtur jumped on his chariot and called his men, who were throwing the the hanged bodies into the flames. The house collapsed, and the soldiers, drunk with blood and violence, walked away, howling like wolves.

The Scythians, led by Ized, had gained the wood where the eye of the scout had discovered them. There Thor had been obliged to bring down the Ziris, who struggled against him and refused to follow him, unless he could find means of carrying her otherwise than in his arms. Hu-gadarn, Og, and Herser had not returned with the horses. Thor grew impatient at this delay, listened to the sounds of the night, and consulted the horizon in the direction of the city. Nemeith, lying on the moss, said nothing. He was sad; but, faithful to friendship, he silenced his jealousy and gnawed some food.

The burning of the house alarmed the Scythian. He approached Ziris and urged her to go back with him. She asked for a cart.

"Easier to get one of Kais's mammoths," Thor said in a harsh tone.

The Scythians finally arrived with the horses. The day was breaking and the howls of Surtur's soldiers could be heard.

"Let us go," said Thor, "we must gain the mountains; Ziris, you have to ride behind me.

The descendant of the kings of Atlantis, surprised that they dared to command her thus, raised her brow and said: "He who gives me orders does not know that I receive them only from the gods."

Instead of answering her, Thor lifted her up on his horse, without troubling himself about crumpling her delicate limbs, and cried, "Forward!" Ziris, offended, forgot the vexation that Nemeith had caused her, and stretched out her arms towards him as if to invoke him.

Nemeith almost rushed to friend Thor to reproach him for his rudeness; but danger was pressing, and Hanaid was about to be forgotten; he remembered that she was entrusted to him and he must carry her away with gentleness. Hu-gadarn took charge with Ized as navigator, and they all galloped off.

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Surtur and his fevered Ethiopians entered the woods. Soon their horses refused to advance, disorder broke out in the ranks. The king of Cos wanted to push his rebellious steeds on; but they reared up, struggled, broke their traces, and overturned the chariot. Surtur, entangled in his guide-traces, was dragged across the rocky ground. He got up, and, in his fury, threw stones at his horses. He calls his men, but they ran off or were carried away by their frightened animals. Then the thickets parted, the branches came lowering down, and Kais, on a huge golden-tusked mammoth, presented himself before Surtur. He was followed by his whole troop of elephants, ridden by his sentinel Ombos warriors.

"By the divine Adityas! What is the king of Cos doing here?" asked the young prince from the top of his living citadel.

"Let plague eat you and your behemoths! Where are you bound?" spat Surtur.

"I'm taking my presents for a walk" Kais replied, flashing a smile. "I am not fighting you. Who could fight against a king as handsome, as tall, as black as you? Although right now you look... somewhat less than regal".

“Kais! the time is not well chosen for mockery; instead of going away, help me to catch up with Ziris.”

“By all the columns of Varuna! I would not interfere with your marital affairs”.

“Then go your way, king of fools! You have wasted precious time.”

“Oh King of the Monkeys! Your badly trained horses must be blamed for your spill”.

The violent Surtur, in reply, picked up a branch and threw it in Kais’s face; the latter, who had short sight, could not avoid it, and received it in the eye.

He cried out to his Ombos: “Will you let your king be killed? Run him down with the elephants.”

Surtur’s remaining soldiers only stung the colossi, which flew into a fury; with their formidable trunks, they broke branches, uproot trees, and make rocks fly. Surtur struggled through branches and fled on foot, pursued by the foot-troop sent by Kais. At the edge of the wood, the black King found some of his Ethiopians, jumped on the chariot of one of them and wanted to bring them back to the fight, but the sight of the elephants had chilled their courage. They hesitated fatally. A volley of expert arrows from the Ombos puts them to flight. Surtur, exasperated, turned his fury against his own soldiers; he pursued them, chased them, struck them. In his mad race to do so, his horses fell down, and he was thrown roughly against a tree trunk.

He woke dazed and swollen. He was alone. The trees, twisted and stripped by the trunks of the mammoths, were lit starkly by the sun; the grass, flattened by chariot wheels and feet, slowly rose, and the silence of the forest was only disturbed by the cooing from unseen twigs in the high branches. Surtur wanted to rise; but he fell back without strength.

Later a woman approached the king of Kos: it was fat Purusha. When she saw the man who had hung her beautiful and beloved friends, and then burned them, she swore bloody revenge. She bound his hands and feet, and, taking one of the two swords which he bore at his side, she inflicted on him a punishment more horrible than death.

Chapter XVII

Satourann, at the head of two hundred war chariots and two thousand sentinels and support, had thrown himself into the plain. Arhimaz had rallied to him in hatred of Kais, betraying their apparent alliance on the stairs. The King and his advisor Kayo Marath had set out to occupy, with ten thousand elite sentinels, the defiles of the Atlai, while a flotilla cruised on the coasts and guarded the strait which separated Atlantis from the mountains of Kaf.

Kais, his head-would wrapped in linen, was returning to his dominions with his mammoths, when Thor and his companions threw themselves headlong into the midst of his retreat. They realized that it was too late to get out from under the thundering feet. The Scythian wanted to turn his bridle to protect Ziris; but the mammoth that Kais rode give him no time. He removes the fugitive at the end of his golden trunk and places her, without doing her any harm, with her master.

Thor rushes at the colossus and wants to shoot it, at the risk of killing the one he is carrying. He searches for a target in vain. Nemeith, whose horse refuses to advance, jumps to the ground and comes to fight near his friend. Hu-gadarn, Herser, Hanaid, and Ized are carried away by their mounts, frightened at the sight and smell of the elephants. Thor attacked with his slingshot. The Ombos retaliate with volleys of arrows; Nemeith sweeps them aside with his spear.

Suddenly, Satourann emerged at the head of his war chariots. The two friends understand that they cannot defeat two armies, and that they

must flee to return later to the head of their tribes. They creep like two snakes into the ferns, and disappear from the eyes of the enemy.

On seeing Satourann, Kais lowered the cedar ladder which he used to climb onto his mammoth, and the Ziris descends to her father. The king bowed to her and showed her, without uttering a word, his covered chariot to invite her to get into it.

“King, father,” she said proudly, “since when has the Ziris no longer been entitled to her freedom?”

“From the moment a Ziris acts like a mere mortal.” Ziris lowered her head and submitted.

Satourann then turned to Kais: “King of the Ombos! if I had not promised my daughter’s hand to Surtur, I would have you for my son-in-law; but you may choose ten of my natural daughters and a hundred of my concubines; they are yours. I would grant you the Guild of the cornfields, and when we have defeated the queen of the Amazons, her kingdom will be yours. What more might you want?”

“The twenty golden vases of Surtur.”

“Hah. I will see to it that he gives them to you.”

The army set out on the march, and arrived at sunset in sight of Sisparis. The weary soldiers heard the growing sound of the city inhabitants, gloomy and desolate, as they ran through the streets, crowded into the squares, wandered in the suburbs, all looking for the Ziris, and how they told each other of their misfortune. Then at the news of her return, the whole city resounded with shouts of joy. The fires of Atanor rose high and bright in the sky: Ptah-light wanted to pierce the darkness to light the way of those who brought back his high priestess.

Yet one spot was dark. Under the nighted arch of the palace gate, the royal chariot struck against an obstacle placed perhaps purposely across the track. A wheel was broken, and the heavy carriage was felled.

The priests and the virgins consecrated to the fire, ran around the Ziris, lying as if buried. No one dared to pull her out of the mess; all groaned, tore their hair, or covered themselves with dust as a sign of pain. A stranger, wrapped in a long dark drapery, his face hidden under the visor of a helmet, pushed aside the crowds, roughs up the rowdier priests and raised the princess. In spite of the imprecations of the crowd, he carried Ziris off, and threatened with his large axe anyone who tried to bar his way; but no one dares to lay a hand on him, so great is the fear of touching the clothes of the Ziris. He fled into the countryside.

The alarm raised, the garrison ran to the walls. The gates were grinding closed, but the Ziris and her captor were gone.

Among the trees Ziris rips off her captor's helmet. "The red rooster!" she exclaims. Her mother's dream comes back to her. She raises her eyes to Atanor, and sees the eternal fires lengthen in long spirals, rise a thousand cubits, and be extinguished in the clouds.

At that very moment, a crash like that of lightning rolls in the bowels of the earth; the ground trembles, and the city, plunged in darkness, sways like a ship on the angry waves. A huge cry of horror rises to the sky. The Atlanteans lose their senses; they call to each other, implore Ptah or curse him, become furious, seek each other and strike each other. The palaces were overthrown, and fire broke out at several points. In the light of the fire, Satourann sees the sacrilege running swiftly like the wind. Ziris has wrapped her arms around her head and her face is pressed against hers. The king, now ridden forward among the vanguard and pressing through the wailing mob, cries out to the multitude:

“Kill him! Snatch back the sacred Ziris from him! Ptah is angry, Ptah wants blood!”

In a minute Kais turns his warriors and their great beasts, and their advance crushes all those who hinder his progress; but the maddened crowd is in such a hurry that it surges on. No ramparts will be too high or the ditches too deep for the kidnapper to escape them.

Chapter XVIII

He is sure he is about to be hit in the back by an arrow, but he rushes on, Ziris in his arms. Then they rested, Nemeith watching for the first light of twilight. It is the time at which glides softly in the night-sky the pale winged ship of the Acwins, the twin gods who are also called the divine horsemen, because of the lightness of their course in the air and on the waters. Their invisible ship received the Titan and the Ziris, supported them on the foam of the waves, and carried them far away to the shore.

“You would have preferred to be kidnapped by Thor?” he asked her as they lay in the quiet grass.

“I am not saying that. Yet you acted without consulting me.”

“I didn’t have time. Do you regret having left Sisparis?”

“I don’t regret being out of King Surtur’s reach; but where are you leading me?”

“Towards the foot of the Atlai. It was agreed with Thor that this would be the rallying point. Not being the strongest, we had to act cunningly. We have followed you all day, watching for the moment to seize you, like foxes watching for a grouse. The opportunity was for me.”

They went on, under a thick forest. Footsteps cracked the dry branches. Nemeith stopped and imitated the cry of the curlew.

“Do you have Ziris?” Thor asked him, introducing himself by stepping out of shadows.

“Here she is,” replied Nemeith.

Thor turned aside and did not thank him, for he was jealous. They soon rejoined their companions already assembled and on horseback.

Hanaid and Ized had not left them. Bolkai’s daughter prostrated herself before the Ziris and said to her: “I give you my life as my brother gave you his, and I am ready to follow you everywhere.”

“And where do you want to follow me? Do I even know where I am going?”

“We are going to Scythia,” replied Thor. Ized will lead us through the land of the Amazons; it is the longest road, but it is the least perilous.”

“It is leading me to death,” replied Ziris. Arthemis their queen is the enemy of my race.

“She is the ally of the Scythians and you are with the Scythians.”

Ized walked over and said: “If the Ziris will trust me, I know of a refuge in the mountains of Our; from there she may make conditions to the king her father, and wait for him to yield to her will.”

“I trust you,” replied Ziris. The runner of Atlantis trembled with emotion, dropped at his feet, and, in the deepest darkness, dared to kiss the hem of her sacred robe.

The kings' daughter would not let Thor take her back on his horse, saying that he had not been able to defend her from elephants; she ordered him to take his fiancee on his back, and declared that she would walk.

None other than the Scythian chief had ever ridden his horse, and he would have considered it a weakness to give it up to a woman. Nemeith also esteemed his own; but Nemeith was good, and he offered his dear horse Asp to the Ziris, who accepted him. He, trusting to his indefatigable hocks, took the bridle and led it, under the eye of his friend, without looking at her, without speaking to her.

Hu-gadarn took the lead position with the runner Ized. Herser followed with Hanaid. Og, Karl, and Iarl brought up the rearguard.

They travelled all day and all night. It was necessary to cross the river Phleget and several rivers, but there was fresh water.

The sun was tinting pink the high peaks of Atlai, already far behind them, when they entered the waterless deserts of Amoun. They followed the caravan route, which was easily recognized by the number of bones of men, horses, camels, and other creatures that littered the ground; hungry vultures, perched on the sun-bleached carcasses, watched them pass by with an eye of covetousness.

Three days later, the Scythians were in the mountain of Ur, without having been spied by the troops of King Satourann, who were looking for them everywhere else.

At the end of a narrow mountain defile, they found themselves in the midst of a cirque of sheer rocks, tiered in tiers and covered with verdure; a waterfall rushed from the summit of the mountain to fall back in fogs and form a stream that ran away in the grass. On the ravines, cedars with dark foliage stretched out and crisscrossed their long arms as if to hide the entrance to this mysterious refuge. Eagles whirled in the air or

came to strike with their wings the rains of the waterfall. Opposite a vast cavern, half-way up a grassy slope, showed its deep black mouth. Formerly inhabited by cultic hermaphrodites, it had been abandoned since the ancient race of these beings - descended from androgynous angels some said - had been persecuted by men and seemed to have disappeared.

Before venturing into the cave-den with the girls, the Scythians gathered dry leaves at the entrance and set fire to it, to make sure that evil animals had not made it their lair. When night came, it was agreed that each one should watch in turn. As there were no lions, tigers, or snakes, the horses were brought in, the bearskins and saddles arranged for the girls to take a little rest. The game that had been killed on the way was cooked and eaten. They were astonished to see Ized discover wooden vessels and a wineskin in the cave. He set an example for the warriors by filling a large cup and emptying it in one gulp. But he was never drunk, and remained sad and proud in their midst.

The girls retired to the back of the den, and the men stretched themselves around the hearth or by the side of their horses.

The place was very well chosen to spend a few days while waiting for the help of Arthemis, whom they would set out to seek. In fear of an unexpected attack, large blocks were piled up by Thor at the entrance of the only defile that gave access to the ravine, and that of the cave was closed with felled tree trunks. After which the men hunted, set traps, or foraged in the mountains. Hanaid and Ized were in charge of preparing the meals.

Ziris was always a princess in the midst of her savage friends, and inspired them with a superstitious fear. Thor himself began to understand that he would be more successful with her by respecting her as she deserved, than by frightening her with his fierce moods.

Nemeith, on his part, avoided any opportunity of making his friend jealous. Ziris no longer feared Nemeith; she esteemed him, and no longer forbade herself from loving him; but she was silent, fearing Thor's vengeance.

One day Hanaid had put herself in a water-pool; Ized, having refused to follow her example, had stood on the edge looking at her. Her religion prescribing ablutions twice a day, and she had found at the foot of the waterfall a large and shallow basin where, hidden from all eyes, she could plunge into the limpid waters. The next day, while she was at the bath, she overheard a conversation between Ized and Hanaid.

"Your body, whiter than ivory, is no less beautiful than your soul," said Ized. "Happy is he whom you have chosen for your bridegroom!"

"The one I love has given his heart to another and doesn't care if I'm beautiful or ugly."

"Women forever seem more eager to be loved by those who despise them than by those who seek them", Ized says with a sigh. Still I am happier than others. Our two friends in there are rivals.

"You're wrong, Ized. Nemeith hates the daughter of Satourann; she shuns him.

"Do not your large, sweet eyes see?"

"By the goddess Manah! what would I not give to know that Ziris loves him!"

"I will give you proof of this. When we were at Civa's, I saw him pull the wedding ring out of his belt and tie it in one of his braids. I asked him what it was. He replied that it was the ring of a sister who had died in his faraway land of Getia, that he was very fond of it, and hid it for fear that it should be stolen from him by the perishes. Yet this morning,

while he was sleeping, a ray of sunshine, which played in the gold of his hair, showed me the image of Ptah, with triple horns, engraved on the ring."

Hanaid cried out, jumping for joy in the middle of the water. Hanaid blushed as she met Ised's bright eyes and put on her clothes.

Ised said quietly: "I saw the goodness of your heart when, leaning like a flower over your brother's corpse, you let yourself be broken by grief. I said to myself, "I will love Hanaid, I will do everything to replace in her affection the brother she has lost."

They returned to the cave without speaking to each other further.

That evening, Ziris, instead of retiring to her fern bed, lay down on Nemeith's bed-skin. He let her do it, and went to her horse. A quarter of an hour later he heard her rise, approach the fire, and rekindle it. When the flame burned, he saw Ziris sitting with her eyes fixed on him. He pretended to sleep, the fire went out. An hour later she approached and carefully slipped her fingers into Nemeith's hair.

"What are you looking for?" he asked her.

"What you must give me back, if you don't love me."

He hesitated to answer. At the same time the Ziris felt a burning tear fall on her hand.

"Do you repent of having offended me at the betrothal meal?"

"I cannot repent" he answered.

She took back her ring and wished to die. When she had gone to bed, he got up noiselessly and eased out of the cave. Raising his arms to the sky: "Heimdall! "O God-Father!" he said, "look at me and tear from my heart

the love that this virgin of fire has kindled there." He let himself fall on the moss, and the earth drank its tears.

Chapter XIX

In the morning Ziris descended the slope of the mountain carpeted with flowers. Her face was pale. The dogs who had appeared at their campside and taken her into friendship, sprang up to her and sought to obtain the caresses which she gladly granted them. She pushed them away. They withdrew with their ears down, near their new master Nemeith who was stretched out in the grass. "Call your dogs," she said to him in an angry voice. They annoy me.

"They won't bore you for long."

"Oh, are you going to leave?"

"Yes"

"Do you think I want to stay here without you, in Thor's care? If I have to suffer his tyranny, then kill me now."

"I will stay then." But he didn't know what to do.

Hanaid advanced to meet Ziris, and said "You promised to make my fiance Thor understand that he had to give you up."

"Hanaid, the Scythian is not my subject, and I do not command here; but I will try to do what you ask of me. Go get Thor."

The Cyclops's daughter put her hands on her heart to thank her, and continued: "You're taller now, Ziris. May the king, your father, consent to give you to him whom you have chosen!"

“I have chosen and love no one,” replied Ziris, playing with her ring.

Hanaid ran, with hope in her heart, to him whom she loved. “You can never heal the wound you have done me by killing Bel,” she said, “and yet I love you enough to forgive you.” Choose me as your wife before the Ziris, she consents to marry us.”

Tor sighed: “Daughter of the Cyclops, I loved Ziris before I knew you, and death alone will prevent her from belonging to me.”

“And yet, if she were in love with another, would you renounce her?”

“By the black Loki! I would not give it up, and I would kill my rival.”

“If it was your friend who loved her?”

Thor’s eyes flashed.

“I don’t know what I would do. Leave me girl, you torment my soul.”

Hanaid wept, but Thor took no notice. Ized came to her, wiped her eyes, and kissed her several times to console her; but it was neither the caresses nor the kind words of the Runner that could restore her happiness.

Nemeith, still half hidden in the grass, had seen and heard everything. He resolved to put an end to his own torments, and wishing to bring some consolation to the afflicted girl, he approached and took her hand.

“You offer me to be my husband?” she said, startled by his gesture.

“You are beautiful enough that I have no great merit in doing my duty. Raise your heads, daughter of Bolkai, and do not let yourself be overwhelmed by sorrow. Among the Scythians, when, by misfortune, a warrior sends a woman’s brother or husband to the lair of death, he will

offer him his life in exchange. She is free to kill him or marry him. Thor should have surrendered to you. He didn't. Being his friend, I must not let him commit cowardice, and thus... I come in his place."

"Nemeith, let me think about your request; but if I refuse you, it will not be out of contempt or aversion."

"What do you want time to to think about? Are you going to try to bring Thor back to you by arousing his jealousy? Do you think that he will love you in this way? Make no mistake, you do not know the will of the Scythians. Give up on him and don't try to break the friendship that unites us: that would be wrong.

The Ziris appeared at the entrance of the cave and called Hanaid in an imperious tone. The latter had to obey.

Ziris had nothing to say to; she simply wanted to prevent him from talking to Nemeith.

In the night, when all were fast asleep, Nemeith slipped into the shadows beside Hanaid. He met the hand of the young girl, who held his own, and he spoke boldly.

"If you like my offer, give me a good answer, and we'll leave tomorrow."

"You would leave your companions, your friend and... even the Ziris?"

"I will meet my friend in Scythia, after he has married Ziris."

"But she doesn't like the Scythian, and I believe she is in love with you."

"You're wrong."

"Do you hate her?"

“No,” cried Nemeith.

“Do you like her, then?”

“Hanaid, I would be lying if I hid from you that she burned my heart; but I must not think of her.”

“Be silent, you are talking too loudly,” said the young girl, covering his mouth with her hand.

“How cold you are! You are trembling,” he said, drawing her to him.

She repulsed him, but so feebly that Nemeith did not think it necessary to obey her.

“Respect me, I will be your wife.”

“Then give me a kiss.”

“No!” she said, frightened, “I should die of it.”

“Do not be afraid.”

“And the mouth of Nemeith rested on hers.”

The girl uttered a cry, pushed it away, and hid her face.

The girl he held in his arms was Ziris. He hurriedly regained his bed-skin. Thor was roused and asked the cause of this cry of terror. A tremendous noise answered him as a jet of flame which suddenly rose from the brazier, Nemeith saw Hanaid sleeping twenty paces from him.

The earth trembled, and the frightened horses broke their pickets. “It’s like the sea!” cried Herser, feeling himself lifted up by the wind on his

bed of dry grass. Wind, thunder, and hail rushed into the ravine. Nemeith bridled his horse Asp, silently, whistled the dogs, and came out of the cave.

“Do the chariots of Satourann and the great elephants of Kais pass over our very heads?” asked Hu-gadarn, waking up.

“Where are you going in the midst of the storm?” Thor yelled.

“I will go in search of Arthémis to obtain from her the transport on her boats.”

“In this storm? You’ll go tomorrow, I’ll go with you,” said Hu-gadarn. “Wait until the storm has passed, We must not defy the gods.”

“Stay here, I will!” cried Ziris.

“I must go, Ziris”.

The princess broke one of her pearl necklaces in anger. Thor, seeing this, understood everything and said to his friend:

“You are right to want to leave, go away!”

Nemeith jumped on his horse and disappeared.

Chapter XX

During the day, while the men were out hunting, Ziris ran to dive into the waterfall. Hanaid and Ized, who remained in the cave, heard a cry that split the air. They rushed out and saw the Ziris surrounded by huge hairy satyrs, frightful beings who populated the earth before man. One of them seized her, threw her on his bony spine, and, followed by

the whole band, gained the forests which crowned the ridges of the mountain. Thor, attracted by the screams of the girls, rushed after the captors. With his axe he killed one; the others threw themselves on him, bit him on the throat, and he fell on his face to the ground. His companions came to his assistance and raised him up half dead, entrusted him to the care of Hanaid, and set out in pursuit of the satyrs. The Cyclops's daughter, forgetting all resentment, burst into tears when she saw the one she loved bleed by two deep wounds. Thor soon opened his eyes and asked for Ziris. When he heard that she had disappeared, he flew into a fit of fury and attacked Hanaid. He wanted to get up, but his strength betrayed him. Thinking of the fate that awaited the sacred virgin, he fell into despair and wanted to kill himself. Hanaid did not leave him, and nursed him as if he had been her brother.

In the evening the Scythians returned without even finding the trail of the monsters. Ziris had first screamed when she saw herself being abducted by them, then fear had choked her voice.

Ziris was shivering with cold under these trees, larger and higher than the columns of the Atanor temple. She felt herself lost in the depths of those green dens into which no mortal had yet penetrated. To implore clemency was useless. These primitive beings did not understand human speech. She trembled at the thought that even death would not save her from their injuries. They ran for a long time, and at last stopped under an interlacing of climbing vines, which, with the ancient trees they embraced, formed a canopy of branches, leaves, and flowers, impenetrable to the rays of the sun.

The tallest of the satyrs, a monster eight cubits high, with a head as large as that of a hippopotamus, and a mouth armed with formidable teeth, advanced towards the sacred girl, now half naked and shivering. He placed beechnuts and berries before her; then, frolicking, jumping, grimacing, he seemed to invite her to eat. But she, with haggard eyes and clenched teeth, rejected his offers.

The primitive gave little yelps, and, moving his lips, he brought his broad muzzle to the lips of the girl.

She put her hand to her talisman and cried, “Back, you evil demons!” I am Ziris.

The sound of the very word frightened the monsters, who climbed screaming into the trees. Ziris saw her chance and weak though she was, she darted through the forest. They, seeing their prey escape, sought to climb down and set out in lumbering pursuit. Terror had given the young girl the agility of a deer; but, in the mad race, she became entangled in the vines and fell. They were about to reach her, when a hail of arrows stopped them.

This unexpected help came from Arthemis and her Amazons, sending a piercing hail of javelins, then striking with their sagaris, they rushed upon these fearful kings of the primeval forest, put them to death and carried off Ziris.

“What harm do you have?” asked the blonde queen.

“None, thanks to you.” I am grateful to you. Ziris trembled at seeing herself surrounded by all these warrior girls, and, struck by the beauty of her who commanded them, she recognized in Arthemis the terrible enemy of her father.

They appraoched two thousand tents or huts of branches, pitched without regularity on a hill; a river on one side, a palisade and a ditch on the other; a hut of tree trunks, the palace of Arthemis, designated by a pole surmounted by a leopard’s skin; in the middle, the tree of war, whose trunk is covered with hair and heads taken from the enemy: this is the ash tree Ygdrasill, venerated by the Amazons; horses tied to stakes, quarters of venison roasting in the fires of bivacs; half-naked girls, tanned, wrestling, shooting with bows or challenging each other to run; a pungent smell; a burning sun: such was the camp of the Amazons.

“And who are you?” said the Queen.

“A Pelasgius. Let me go back to my father”.

“You have soft hands and skin, very white for a fisherman’s daughter.”

Ziris didn’t answer.

“You will stay with me,” replied Arthemis, “and I will keep you as a slave”.

“I, slave!” cried the daughter of kings, turning pale.

“What would I get for for your ransom? A handful of wheat or some fish?”

“You’ll get the Grain Syndicate. I am the daughter of the king of kings, and woe to you if you do not respect my sacred person.”

By the wrath of Heimdall! I suspected so. It will be sweeter for me to put to enslave and put to death the great Ziris of Atlantis than the daughter of a fisherman.”

Then, calling Myrrhine and Anthares, she said to them: “Put the iron rings on her arms!”

When Ziris saw the insignia of servitude on his bruised wrists, tears of shame and rage welled up

“Slave, pour me a drink!” replied Arthemis, handing over his cup.

“Give me an amphora of blood and I will annoint you with barrenness and cowardice! May the wind that blows from the mountains of Kaf

scatter your tents, and may your name be cursed for all future generations!"

"I'll rip out your tongue!" cried the Amazon pulling her sword. Then, changing her mind: "No, I will have your hands and nostrils cut off, the punishment of rebellious slaves, and I will send you back to your father the King."

"Daughter of death," replied the Ziris, "you will not will draw from me neither a cry nor a complaint."

"This is what we will see tomorrow in in the middle of the camp." And turning to her warriors: Chain this up! Myrrhine, you answer for her".

Chapter XXI

The Amazon obeyed, took Ziris to a hut, tied her to a stake, and lay down across the entrance.

A few moments later, Nemeith arrived in front of the camp of the Amazons. Two of the guards galloped forward, preparing their bows.

"Valiant girls!" cried Nemeith, "Stay your arrows: we are friends!"

"The brave man with golden hair," said Anthares, "come and take your place at our fire."

"Blonde warrior, I want to talk to your queen first and foremost."

She led him to Arthemis; the latter was stretched out on a lion's skin, in the midst of her black dogs; she sharpened her knife thinking of King Satourann's daughter. At the sight of Nemeith, the dogs growled.

"Ah! Is it you, valiant rooster?" she said mockingly.

"Yes, you naughty hen, it's me!"

The Amazon straightened up, and, threatening him with her dagger: "Are you coming here to insult me again?"

"Light of battles", he replied "bending my knee, I come with good grace to do what you wanted to force at Sisparis in the presence of the whole world."

The Amazon blushed, but not with anger.

"Rise up," she said, in a tone less irritated, "your pride has at last lowered itself before mine."

"I bow down before the sun, why should I not pay homage to the most beautiful star of the night?"

Arthemis answered: "Flattery is a trap that you men set for women; but with me your words are lost. If I liked you, it would be for me to speak and not to listen. Tell me what you're looking for here?"

He implored her assistance, and informed her that the Scythians were in the cave with the princess; that a body of six thousand Atlanteans, under the leadership of the advisor Kayo-Marath, was only waiting for the arrival of King Satourann and his allies to enter the mountains.

"Your good companions will go over the mountains to Scythia. I agree to provide them with the means to do so; but I doubt if they would want to do so without taking the daughter of the Atlantean king."

“Thor certainly won’t return home without her.”

“However, it will have to be,” said the Queen.

“What, do you want to take away the Ziris from him? As payment for the safe passage?”

“Man, you speak and you know nothing. The great Ziris, the living goddess of Atlantis, is in my power; I have made her my slave and will not give her back.”

Nemeith was stunned and but he continued: “I left her this morning in the mountains of Our, she cannot be in the camp of the Amazons this evening.”

“Arthemis never lies,” she replied proudly.

“So... give her back to me, in the name of friendship!”

“Hmmm... I should be sorry if you did not do your duty as a friend; so you will have a chance to win the beautiful Atlantean tomorrow.”

Nemeith was about to thank her when she added: “But I will keep her head to nail it to the tree of war.”

“Beautiful rooster! Do not speak. You will not soften me,” replied the Amazon, turning her back on him.

“Goddess of the night! I swear, on my father’s bones, that I will prevent you from committing such a crime! I do not want those who sing of the exploits of the warriors at your funeral to say of you: ‘Arthemis was beautiful as a star; her fair hair resembled the flame of a comet, his arms were white, and his arrows swift; but her heart was harder than her iron axe’“.

As Nemeith bridled Asp, Anthares asked where he was going.

“I don’t know,” he replied angrily.

“Are you sad?”

“Yes, poisoned to the very heart.”

“Warrior, Arthemis it seems has repulsed your love, and you deserve to be loved.”

“I don’t even like your queen,” he spat.

The Amazon was tall, she had beautiful shoulders and sensous hair. Nemeith saw in his offer a way not to leave the camp and… perhaps to rescue Ziris from the vengeance of Arthemis. He disembled: “Daughter of war! your face has the roundness of the full moon and your loins have the suppleness of young branches. I accept your hospitality.” He tied his horse to a tree and followed Anthares.

The star Sirius shone above the camp’s tree of war; the moon was rising red in the mist of the horizon, and the guard-fires were extinguished in the camp, when Arthemis came out of her hut. The rage of having been confronted by the Ziris, her anger against Nemeith, her jealousy perhaps, and the regret of having let him go without being able to come to an understanding with him, had kept sleep away from her eyelids. She was wandering about with her head on fire when she recognized Nemeith’s horse near Anthares’ tent. Her heart leaped in her breast; she stopped and listened. Without taking the time to look for the entrance to the tent, she split the canvas with a blow of her axe, rushed at Anthares, seized her by the hair and dragged her out.

A sharp sound like that of a stone being broken, a shrill cry, heartrending, and Anthares lay with her head split open at the feet of

Arthemis. The latter, standing, with a fierce eye and her bloody axe in her hand, appeared to Nemeith as the goddess of death.

“Why?” asked Nemeith.

“Because it pleased me to do so,” she replied. And pointing to the gate of the camp with an imperious gesture: “Get out of here, and let me never see you again.” Nemeith went, Arthemis threw down her bow, dropped by the corpse of Anthares, and rolled on the ground, roaring like a lioness.

As soon as Arthemis had noticed the disappearance of her prisoner, her anger knew no bounds. She had Myrrhine, who had let the Ziris escape, tied to the tree of war, and gouged out her eyes to punish her for not having been able to keep them open; after which she drove her out of the camp.

Chapter XXII

Nemeith halted five hundred paces from the camp and resolved still to deliver Ziris from slavery; Anthares had informed him well. He cut ferns and wrapped them around his body in such a way that he could not be distinguished among the brushwood. He left his horse in the care of his dogs and made his way to the ditch that defended the camp.

He lets himself slide into it. The moon was veiled; Nemeith blew her a kiss to thank her for helping him. He crawled to the hut where Ziris is guarded by Myrrhine and another Amazon. To enter it was impossible without killing these girls, and the fight would attract Arthemis and the whole army. He slipped over to a group of sleepy horses and huddled in the middle of their fodder. One of them took him for his food and idly grazed his garment. Nemeith is not worried about it and remained

silent, waiting for luck. One of the Amazons moved away for a moment, Myrrhine did not move. Was she asleep? The time had come. He sprang towards the hut and slipped in like a snake.

"Don't shout!" he said in a low voice to Ziris, "and come quickly. I am Nemeith".

"I'm tied to a stake!" the girl said.

He quickly cut her bonds and carried her away. The sky was black and Myrrhine had heard nothing. Nemeith descended the ditch on his back, hoisting Ziris, and found his horse. A few drops of rain fell large and warm, and thunder rumbled in the distance. Having wrapped the Ziris wrmly in her bed-skin, Nemeith took her on his back and left. The darkness was so deep, and star-glimpses few. They knew so little of the country that they became lost. Nemeith urged his tired horse on at random. They turned back in a loop and fell into the middle of an Atlantean encampment whose fires were going out. The awakening call had been was given; but before they were up and about and the night-flames had been rekindled, Nemeith had passed over and was running down into the plain.

Going was easier when they were on the plain, but when the storm broke out they had to take refuge under the lentic bushes to let the worst of the storm pass.

Ziris did not know how to show her saviour the gratitude she owed him; her wounded pride held her back.

Nemeith did not speak. He was happy to have snatched from death this young girl whom he loved, and yet he cursed in a low voice the fate that would make him perjured.

They set off again. Soon, by the light of the lightning, they saw a large expanse of water in front of them. "We are near the sea, take care of cliffs!" cried Ziris.

Shortly after, the roll of a war chariot was heard.

"We are being pursued," said Nemeith; "Change places, arrows will rain down on our backs". The enemy was gaining on them. Nemeith said he heard the whistle of an arrow, and then another suddenly remained clinging to his hair. He lifted her up with a strong arm and placed her in front of him. "Mosquitoes bite in this stormy weather!" he joked, to lighten the mood.

At a new hit, he felt his horse stagger on his legs; he had only time to jump off to the ground with Ziris in his arms. The beloved Asp fell. Nemeith made Ziris lie beside the dead horse, threw his bed-skin over her, seized his spear and ran to meet and distract the enemy. A flash of lightning made him recognize the slave Kedar ready to throw his javelin and Kayo-Marath urging on the war-horses. Tackling the negro first, Nemeith struck him with his spear in the right flank, and saw the flint point come out from the other side. Kayo-Marath lets go of the chariot reins and threatened his enemy with his sword, which shattered when he encounters the powerful stone axe of Nemeith. The King's henchman thrown out of his chariot, which continues rumbling on its way. A new flash of lightning showed Nemeith the corpse of the grinning negro lying on the road, the horses mired in a stream swollen by the storm, and Kayo-Marath ready to seize Ziris. The flash was all that was needed. Nemeith's swinging axe split his skull.

He fell, struggling and jerking in his spewing blood and tearing the earth with his nails. Nemeith puts his hand on his head, and, swift as lightning, with a single stab he takes off the dead man's hair, uttering a war-cry. Then he ran to Kedar and cut his neck, saying: "Bah, the wool of a black sheep never made a scalp!"

He returned to Ziris and made her touch his bloody trophy in the darkness.

“What do you want to do with the hair of the enemy?” she asked.

“I will offer it to his wife, to whom I promised it.”

And then he cleaned it on the grass and he hung it on his belt. Then, turning to his horse he sighed: “O you, Asp, companion of my troubles and my joys, you who leaped when you felt me on your broad loins! Your nobility fell struck by a black slave. Your mane was rough as the brushwood of the steppes, your nervous legs could run all day and night without feeling tired. O my poor horse! your loss weighs on my heart more than a heavy stone.”

“Are you going to mourn a beast as a friend?” asked the princess.

“Animals are often better than men,” he replied. “But we have to go back, I hear the distant sound of new chariots”.

Chapter XXIII

He took the water and pulled the charioteer and the horses of the dead commanader out of the quagmire, and recalled his dogs that were trying to devour the corpses. Ziris jumped up beside him, and the swift steeds flew through the woods and bogs all the dark night. The storm ceased, and the moon showed its silvery disc through the wind-torn clouds. Their enemies had given up pursuing them, and the tired horses were slackening. Nemeith halted under a majestic fig tree that might have sheltered an army. The branches, descending to the ground, had taken root there and formed so many stems that soared straight into the dome of foliage. This tree was a wood in itself. The horses unharnessed, Nemeith’s thick arms overturned the chariot to shelter his companion; she took refuge there and fell asleep under the guard of a man who was

determined to keep watch. Bbt fatigue, stronger than his will, stretched him at the feet of the Ziris.

He awoke with the day, and saw in the distance the sea and the mountains of Our in the blue horizons. He had turned his back on them and had stayed away from them for more than two days. He adjusted the thongs that held his deerskin shoes to his legs, woke Ziris, straightened the wagon, harnessed the horses, and retraced his steps.

"Where are we going?" asked Ziris.

"To the cave," replied Nemeith, surprised at his question.

"I don't want to go back there. This whole journey is unworthy of me, and when I counted on the protection of Thor the Scythian, I did not expect to be treated by him as a captive. He spoke to me like a master and I will never forgive him for that. If you cannot protect me from your friend, take me back to Sisparis and be done with me."

"Don't be a stupid little fool"

"Are you going to talk to me harshly like he did? But I understand, I'm a burden on you." And she jumped off to the ground.

"If return to Sisparis is your will, then all that I have done for you and for Thor was useless. You would have done better to accept King Surtur as your husband. Your father would have had a fine line of little black monkeys fighting for the throne of Atlantis. Atlantis! Cursed, thrice cursed be the day I met you! Go, return. I will go back to my friend and tell him: I am coming back alone, I have not been able to bring back to you the one you love. He may think me guilty of your murder, who knows?"

"I regard as my enemy the man who wishes to deliver me to another man, even if that man be his brother."

Nemeith felt then a change in his heart. The ideas and customs of his tribe seemed barbarous to him, and Ziris's proud words made him feel for the first time the sting of jealousy.

"Well," said he, "since you hate my friend, you will not belong to him in spite of me. Return to your gods and your country; I owe you protection, I will lead you."

She came back to him, stepped aboard and he turned the chariot towards Sisparis. She leaned on his strong arm to protect herself from bumps.

They had been travelling for a long time without speaking to each other, when Ziris broke the silence first and said:

"Nemeith, forgive my words of hatred and I will forget the offense you have done me by despising my covenant."

"By my father's bones! I never blamed you. I have you in great esteem, I respect you, but I will die rather than betray friendship."

"Ziris, this is your father now. See, ahead..." said Nemeith. "Shall I bring you to him?"

Clouds of dust rose over the plain. The standards of Satourann fluttered distantly in the wind, and the armor, the harnesses, the crowns glittered in the rays of the sun. The king of kings marched in the centre with his cataphracts and pharetrates; Kais occupied the right wing with his heavy mammoths which made the earth tremble under their feet and flattened the thickets; Arhimaz, on the left, was laying wide ears of corn under the wheels of his chariots full of sentinels. The Atlantean army advanced like a wall of bronze, gold, and iron which held the two ends of the horizon.

“Do you not know that they will put you to death for having carried me off?”

“What does death matter to me! I have not had happiness in life and I never will now.” Ziris felt loved.

“Let us flee,” she said to him. Nemeith turned back and with his spear-flat slapped the horses to speed up their course. Ziris was hugging him. He forgot himself for a moment; she was so near that he kissed her hair, and then pushed her away quickly.

“Nemeith”, she said, “the other night in the cave, did you mean all that you said to me?”

“Ziris, I thought I was talking to Hanaid.”

“Then why are you kissing me?” Nemeith did not need to give a reason.

One of the horses fell down, he wanted to raise it. But the exhausted animal was dead. He cut off the other’s traces. The latter slipped away and lost himself in the ranks of the enemy, where he raised an alarm.

The light-footed Nemeith seized Ziris and ran on foot until nightfall. When he had put a considerable distance between himself and the king of kings, he stopped to breathe on the edge of a small lake.

“I’m scared!” Ziris cried. “The gods are angry with us.”

Hippopotamuses, rhinoceroses, oryxes were frolicking in the water in the warm moonlight. As he was showing them to Ziris, a snake, as large and long as a tree, rose before him hissing, and slipped through the rushes, from which gigantic salamanders and monk toads immediately sprang up. The toads soon disturbed the calm of the night by their hoarse croaking. The curious hippopotamuses came forward, blowing.

Crocodiles and dragons with flaming eyes seemed to swim towards Nemeith, and in the reeds swarmed myriads of foul and evil beasts.

Nemeith turned his back on these inhospitable shores and did not stop until he was exhausted with fatigue. A hollow tree served as a shelter for the rest of the night. Nemeith fell asleep; but his sleep was disturbed by an incessant crackling and by the beating of wings around his face. In the morning he saw Ziris pale and defeated.

"What is the matter with you, morning-star?"

"Look at the leaves of this tree" she whispered.

He raised his head and saw that these black leaves, motionless in spite of the breeze, were actually great bats hanging from the withered branches.

"They are vampires", said Ziris, "evil spirits of darkness, who suck blood. But I stayed up all night to keep them off by my will, and they respected your sleep."

Chapter XXIV

Nemeith laughed, picked up a stone, and threw it up into the tree. The bats flew away, darkening the sky above with a stinking and sinister cloud. They walked all day. When evening came, rocks on a hill, a few trees, a meadow watered by a stream invited them to stop. Nemeith soon built a hut; the large stones served as walls, the branches provided the roof and the ferns a layer for Ziris.

Nemeith sat down and said: "Here is a beautiful place to take a little necessary rest; but after that, where shall we go, Ziris?"

"What do I know? Men are hostile to us, and everywhere danger threatens us. If the the gods deigned to protect us, we would live in

some deserted place like this, without asking them for anything but the right to love us."

"Ziris, I don't know if your gods are helping or not. I believe only in my own who alone reigns over men and things, and I know that he cannot be deceived. For your sake, I will brave his wrath if necessary, but it will strike you by striking me. Sleep and tell me tomorrow what you have resolved. In life and in death I will share your destiny."

He fell asleep across the threshold of the hut. When he awoke, the sun blazed. Ziris smiled in her dreams: the morning breeze played in her hair and a bee buzzed around her lips and nearly found a kiss. Contemplating her long black eyelashes, her sweet face, the roundness of her white arms and shoulders, betrayed by the numerous tears in her garment, Nemeith, impelled by an invincible force, bent over her as the bee buzzed away. Ziris opened her eyes and brought her mouth so close to Nemeith's... then he sprang up as if he had burned himself, and saw an oryx before him.

The animal scratched the earth with its feet and raised the dust around it. Its eyes shot flames and nostrils smoke. The beast lowered his head and rushed on Nemeith. The man stuck it with his axe between the two horns. The stunned oryx stopped, backed up and fell on its side.

This animal, with its tawny hair, was armed with long horns, which, harder than bronze and sharper than spears, distilled a subtle venom into the wound. His ferocity surpassed that of the tigers, and the roar of the lion did not make him tremble.

Ziris had woken and fled. He called her bck and, as they had taken no food for two days, the oryx was butchered, roasted, and eaten. After the meal, Ziris ran across the meadow picking flowers, from which she wove a crown. She then came back to lie down on her bed of ferns and sing and play with her hair.

She then called the dogs, teased them and petted them. They bounded around her, and she laughed and showed her white teeth. Nemeith looked at her, and she threw flowers in his face, and then she put her hand to his mouth and said: “Bite me like the first time we saw each other?”

Nemeith, tired of struggling with himself, bit her fingers and kissed her arms. She hid the flush of her cheeks in the chest of the one she loved.

A sinister noise restored them to themselves. At first they thought that the wind was rising; yet the foliage was motionless, and the smoke of the hearth rose straight into the sky.

The noise increased, similar to that of the sea. They saw two or three yellowish scorpions, as big as a fist, running at them, then to a dozen, to hundreds, an invasion. They pushed each other, pressed each other in close ranks, and climbed on top of each other. All this grew grizzling, crackling, drooling, and advancing to the width of a stadia. The dogs fled bristling with fear. Nemeith carried off Ziris, pale with terror, and hopped through these venomous battalions, which still gave him some horrible stings.

The plague of insects over, they returned to the hut; but the trees, the grass, the skin of the bed-rug, the remains of the meal, all were razed, stripped, soiled with venom. The dogs were dead, covered in slimy slicks. The granite blocks alone had resisted. A fetid smell was now exhaled from the meadow, which had been once fragrant, and the stream was obstructed with oozing corpses. A plague was there and would likely come again, sooner or later. Nemeith and Ziris fled.

They eventually reached the seashore. As they were following the foot of a cliff, Nemeith sat down on a rock.

“What worry do you have?” Ziris asked him.

“I can’t walk any more,” he said.

He showed her his legs swollen and lacerated by the stings of the scorpions.

She was in despair, but could not find a cure for the venom. The cold sea-water was useless. Wraps of sea-weed had no effect.

“I am cold and I want to die,” Nemeith said, and fell motionless on the sand.

Ziris spoke to him in vain. He seemed dead. She tried to lift it, but she didn’t have the strength. In her grief, she threw herself on him and covered him with kisses to bring him back to life. She implored Ahura Mazda, her son Mithras, and Ptah himself to restore to her her her friend, her savior, her beloved.

These testimonies of love completed the irritation of the gods.

From the vast ocean the waters rose, twisting and lengthening like gigantic serpents as they rose to the sky with the hiss of the hurricane and the crash of lightning. Ziris, distraught, saw herself surrounded by water and fire. She clung to Nemeith’s body and competed with the waves to hold him. The talisman of Bahavani protects against death; she unfastened it and put it around the neck of Nemeith. Then, drawing herself up, she cries out:

“Nereids with green algae hair, daughters of the bitter ocean! Maruts, luminous genies! Savitri with a golden hand that kills pain! Oucha, dawn of shining sails, you who open the gates of day, leave me this warrior, your son by beauty. Help me, help me, protect me!”

Then “O Ptah!” cried the Ziris, “have you come hither to make your power shine forth? Yes, it is you, I recognize you, terrible and jealous god! Turn away your anger, I surrender to you. Spare Nemeith, and I

will return to your temple, and I swear to you that I will keep me clean for yourself alone.

The waves were still rising, and she saw a mountain of black lava rising from the midst of the angry waves, which vomited flames like Atanor. She took off her ring and held it out, saying: “Here is my pledge of submission, take it.”

Then the flaming rock sank into the depths of the ocean. The waterspout subsided, and the torrents of water rushed into the sea. The winds died. The sun reappeared in a shower of gold, and Nemeith opened his eyes again.

“Stand up!” said Ziris, “Ptah consents to let you live”.

“Ptah?” cried Nemeith, “I do not know him! let him show himself, and if he wishes you harm, I will fight him.”

“Be silent!” said Ziris, looking towards the sea. “He could hear you.”

“Now that you can walk,” said Ziris, “Let us go. Take me back to Sisparis. I have sworn to obey the gods; You were right, friend, no one can deceive them.”

Chapter XXV

She attributed to her appeased god the healing of Nemeith, and Nemeith thanked only the foam of the dawn waves, whose virtue had tamed the effect of the venom of her wounds.

They were following the shore, trying to find their bearings, when they distinguished in the distance an immense building, which seemed to be

bathed in the sea. It was not, however, a palace, for there were no towers, terraces, or porticoes.

As he approached, Nemeith thought he saw a hut similar to that which the great barbarian chiefs inhabited in the forests; but it seemed large enough to shelter a whole tribe; and when he came nearer still, he judged that it was a floating barge intended to carry some king. It rested on a hull six hundred cubits long, and innumerable beams forty cubits high held it on its keel.

On the side of the hill that sheltered it were the stumps of the ancient cedar forest that had been used to build it, and the building site, where mountains of shavings and debris stood, was more than a stadia wide.

In the interior of this building site were crowded the huts and tents of the workmen, who formed several villages, with paths traced in sawdust and dust. Whirlwinds of black smoke were exhaled from the boilers where the tar was bubbling up, and the rhythm of the hammers resounded in the forges.

Fishermen had moored their boats in a small sandy cove that extended to the foot of the arch. Above the palisaded enclosure where, for many years, they had been working on this strange craft, the countryside was devastated. A few trees, placed on rocks too steep, had been spared here and there, as if to serve as milestones in the desert which was about to invade the shore. The meadows were bare by the trampling of draught animals. The flowering stems of the aloes, broken by the passage of the carts, hung withered on the ground, and clouds of dust obscured the plain in the distance. Phalanxes of travelling birds, cranes, storks, ibises descended on the sharp ridge of the arch.

A tall old man was working on the work, giving orders, supervising the supplies, talking to everyone, and counting the animals. Ziris recognized in him the magician Xizouthros. She tore a part of her tunic and covered her face after the manner of the women of the land of Our.

Could the priest of Mithras guess the daughter of the king of kings under the miserable rags that covered her?

"Where do you come from?" he asked. "From the land of Our," replied Nemeith, to whom Ziris made a sign not to betray her.

Through these powdery clouds, Nemeith saw herds of oxen, sheep, and goats advancing by shepherds. Women chasing flocks of chickens, peacocks, and guinea fowls before them, camels and elephants laden with corn and wineskins, buffaloes carrying fodder, formed like a snake, whose head buried itself in the wooden house, and whose tail was lost in the gorges of the mountains.

"Yet you are not a subject of King Arhimaz; your skin is white, you are a Titan of the steppes of Scythia without limits. The magician, having seen the chief of Nemeith only covered with paint and warlike ornaments, had not recognized him now under his tattered garments.

"Arhimaz is a great king," said Nemeith, "but I am not his subject. I only went to take a wife from him; I am returning to my tribe and I ask you for hospitality."

Xizouthros motioned to them to follow him. A narrow staircase in the side of the hull led them into the nave, the three stories of which were divided into so many compartments that there was room for all the arrivals.

The magician led them into a room where his family was having the evening meal together.

The setting sun came in through a lattice, and birds sang in wicker cages hung against the walls. Besides the relatives of Xizouthros, about twenty men, all chiefs of tribes belonging to various races, were standing, with their wives and children, around the table. Here Dwylan

and his wife Dwybach, sitting on sacks of seed; there Belgemer, Noach, Deucalion the Pelasgian, on sheepskins or on hay bales.

The magician, preoccupied with the whirlwind that had made itself felt in his vicinity, took no notice of his new guests. He spoke to his alarmed friends and comforted them. "This is nothing yet", he said, "the sea has not risen. When the water bathes the foot of our ark, it will be time to think of taking refuge there. Trust if your hearts are pure." And he added: "Embark your families, your flocks and your supplies; but think, above all, of taking away the most precious of your possessions, wisdom; for, if you forget the spirit of justice, you will arrive at the new earth more stripped and naked than if you had lost your gold and your clothes."

"Wise man," said Nemeith, "you will excuse my curiosity; but I would like to understand why all these preparations! Are you going to go on a long trip?"

The wizard replied: "As a child, Ahura Mazda appeared to me in a dream and warned me that on the 15th of the month Dioisios, men would perish by a flood. He has commanded me to build this great ship of cedar wood, to take on board provisions, to gather the quadrupedal and volatile animals, to warn my friends, my relatives, and those who deserve mercy before him, and when the waters rise from the bottom of the abyss, to abandon myself to the sea. For all men and all animals of earth and heaven will be drowned."

"Will Ptah be drowned too?"

"He will be annihilated."

"On that day I will ask for asylum for my wife and myself."

The magician was about to reply, when loud cries drew him out. It was an army of rats and mice that invaded the construction sites. The

workmen struck, killed, crushed, in order to prevent these devastators from entering the ark and devouring the provisions; but several crept in, and it was decided they were to be allowed. These creatures were not to be lost from the earth.

The ploughmen and the women were grieving over the allowing of this scourge to survive.

"Why did you do that?" said Pyrrha, the wife of Deucalion. The magician said to them, "You should know that I have taken the tiger, the vulture and the snake, which are more formidable enemies of man. All these are necessary for the balance of the wild."

When the sun went down, everyone withdrew. Ziris wanted to follow the daughters of Xizouthros; but they sent her and her pretended husband back to sleep in the hay near the cattle. She resigned herself to this bed, but could not sleep, so much did the beasts of the ark cry, roar, and bellow all night. Nemeith was not sleeping either. Feeling Ziris so close to him, twenty times he was tempted to draw her into his arms. The talisman which she had put round his neck set his breast ablaze. He wanted to throw it away, but when he remembered that it had rested on the bosom of the Ziris, he covered it with kisses and burned his heart more than ever. He soon moved closer to Ziris and searched for her lips.

"Nemeith!" said she, "let us not be guilty, you to your friend, I to my betrothed."

The words of old Xizouthros the wizard came to him then: "Learn that Ahora's Mazda has created nothing useless, and that no one has the right to say to him, 'This is harmful, or 'This is too much.' The wise man who devotes himself to the knowledge of the divine secrets succeeds in discovering in venoms and poisons powerful remedies, and if you do not yet know how to extract good from apparent evil, blame yourself only and do not accuse the sovereign good of not having known what he was doing."

“Do not believe the words of Xizouthros,” Ziris said, guessing what he was thinking of, for she had also heard the wizard’s words. “I know as well as he does the power and the will of the gods, I, the Ziris. Ahura Mazda, the spirit of justice, cannot want to destroy what he has created; but the rebellious Agramanyu struggles eternally against him, and Ptah, angry with me, has made a covenant with the spirit of destruction. Ptah can make the earth shake and the sea burst its banks. Know that over there, at the foot of the cliff, he presented himself to me. I understood that he wanted you dead and that he had raised up plagues and monsters against our love. To destroy us, he would gladly have annihilated the earth under mountains of water. I sacrificed myself for the world and for you. I will never belong to anyone but the god of subterranean fires. Let us leave here before the magician recognizes me, for he would think it necessary to deliver me into my father’s hands, and I wish to return secretly to the city of the Atlanteans. There I will be able to resist the will of the king, to repel the pretensions of the odious Surtur and to preserve your life. Ptah, pleased with us, will save you from all evil.”

They descended noiselessly along the sides of the ark and slipped under the hull. Boats were moored there. They took one and pushed off into the lapping sea.

Chapter XXVI

Thor, scarcely healed from his wounds, was insensible to Hanaid’s care, and - strong man though he was - even wept a little for his lost Ziris. He and his companions had taken in the blinded and exiled Amazon girl. They urged the Amazon to take her place by the fire and draw from their common bowl. When she asked where the Ziris was, she told them that the girl was alive, carried off from the camp by a man. She understood from their astonishment that this man had not returned among them. Then she kindled the Scythian’s anger by telling him that

she suspected this Nemeith of having carried off the woman Thor loved. Thor asked her for her support to help him to take back the daughter of King Satourann: this became the exiled Amazon's greatest desire.

The Amazon told of ways through the mountains. It was resolved that when healed Thor should go to Scythia, assemble his whole tribe, and march on King Sisparis on open battle. They did not know that king had heard the god Ptah had totally abandoned his capital to darkness. He immediately left Arhimaz and Kais to pursue their conquests into the land of the Amazons, and returned to his darkened capital, taking with him a hundred fast warriors. As soon as he arrived, he went with the Kuretes to the temple of Atanor and had the door of the sanctuary opened for him. In the absence of the Ziris, the temple women did not dare to resist. He called his executioners and made many sacrifices there of his war captives. Yet Ptah, even full of victims, did not reappear, and the nights of Sisparis remained plunged in darkness.

Chapter XXVII

The day after the capital's hideous orgy of sacrifice, before the return of dawn, a boat slipped into the port and landed in darkness at the foot of the cliff. Nemeith and Ziris quietly jumped onto the wet flagstones. When the dawn duty-guards came down from the city and were talking with sleepy night-guards, the two gained the quays and slipped into dark deserted streets via ramps cut into the rock.

They crossed the Great Square; wild dogs were there, which were gnawing bones in the growing filth of unswept streets, but the beasts fled at their approach. When they reached the bottom of the Great Stairs, Ziris gestured her companion to raise a slab that covered a secret passage. When this was done, she lit a torch and led him through mysterious galleries to a bronze-studded ebony door, which gave access to the priestess's room.

“Wait for me here,” she said.

He obeyed.

A few moments later, Ziris returned adorned as The Ziris. She had exchanged her tattered clothes for a long tunic of purple fringed with gold. Her breast, neck, and arms disappeared under the jewels, and a diadem of jewels surrounded her shining and perfumed hair.

“Don’t look at me, Nemeith! it is not for you that I have adorned myself in this way; it is for the sake of the God to whom I am going to lead you, that he may forgive me and protect you. I have seen the golden flies gleam in the sun in the fragrant flowers of the steppes, I have seen the rays of the moon play on the pearly waters of the great swamps, but none of this can be compared with your beauty.”

“Don’t go,” said Nemeith; “I can’t lose you now. Come to my land, let us forget everything, and brave the wrath of heaven and men. Have you no more courage?”

He wanted to detain her; but the moment escaped him. He followed her to the sanctuary of Ptah. Red puddles speckled the black flagstones of the extinct volcano crater, and a forest of spikes topped with bloody trophies encumbered the god’s abode.

Ziris recoiled in terror. Nemeith uttered a cry of rage when he recognized the heads of his companions taken captive by the King.

He sought Thor’s head. He was not there. Nemeith breathed a sigh of shattered relief.

The great Ziris, overcoming the horror she felt, took off her ring, cut off a lock of her hair, and threw it into the abyss.

“God Ptah!” she said, “it is not the blood of the Scythians that you want, it is the love of your betrothed. Receive these pledges that unite me to you and return!”

Ptah received her high priestess on her plea of mercy, and accepted her as his wife.

A rumble like that of molten bronze echoed in the bowels of the mountain. Acrid smoke began to roll out of the crater, the corpses were lifted by the bubbling of the sulphur, rose to the mouth of the well, then fell to the bottom, and a fine spray of blue flame burst up into the sky.

“Wife of Ptah,” he whispered, “take this back, for the colossus of fire might be jealous of it and take vengeance on you.”

Nemeith, seeing her devote herself body and soul to this fierce god of whom he no longer doubted, angrily tore off the talisman she had given him. “I no longer care about life, I refuse it.”

“I call my husband to witness that I beg Ptah to keep him in gratitude for what you have done for me. This talisman wards off death.” She took up the amulet again and burst into tears. His grief drove Nemeith beside himself. He defied Ptah, and throwing himself, axe in hand, on the pillar of flames, he cut it three times. The god did not deign to see his fury. He felt limp.

Ziris dragged Nemeith out of the sanctuary. As he passed in front of the ebony door, he seized the Ziris in his arms: “What’s behind that door?” He asked.

“The bridal chamber of the one to whom I have just devoted myself”.

Nemeith smashed open the mysterious door with his fist, and saw, in the centre of a round hall carved out of lava and covered with strange

symbols, a bed of richly wrought solid gold, from which a reddish light escaped through a black veil.

Nemeith tore off this veil, saying to the virgin of Atlantis: “Where is your god? In the smoke of this sepulchral lamp?” And he took the lamp, threw it on the pavement, drew the priestess to his breast, and devoured her with kisses more burning than the fires of Ptah. Intoxicated, distraught, she was uniting her lips to his, when came dull and sinister blows, issuing from the bowels of the earth. It was as if an invisible enemy had attacked the temple and the mountain with a battering ram below, and these recalled her to herself.

“Listen, listen,” she said, “do not make me sacrilegious and perjured. Nor offend the dreadful god. He has awakened.”

Cries and songs of joy arose from the city, then the hurried steps of the attendants made the stairs and vaults of the palace resound.

“Wait for me here,” said the priestess, “I owe myself to my god, to my people; I will speak to the Atlanteans, regain my power, and you may get out safely.”

Instead, he fled. “Cursed be your power,” said Nemeith, “cursed be your subjects and your gods! I don’t want anything more from them or from you.”

Ziris ran to the temple and appeared on the platform, before the eyes of what jhad become a delirious crowd. There were excessive, frenetic, universal cries. In every corner of the city, people laughed, wept with happiness, they said: “The Ziris has never left Sisparis. The god Ptah kept her hidden in the depths of his subterranean palace. The divine bridegroom has now celebrated their fiery wedding-bed”.

The observant female attendants added: “See! she sacrificed the lock of virgins’ hair and gave her nuptial ring”. “Speak, speak, Ziris!” they cried.

“Yes, I mean...” Then she intoned the correct opening address. “Ace, Antes, Eris, Kuretes, kasdims, magi and mobeds, Pelasgians, shepherds, women, children, old men, men of all races and castes... WHO has dared to stain my husband’s bed with the blood of the Scythians, my friends? I the Ziris reject these abominable offerings, worthy only of vampires and ghouls. In the future, respect the sanctuary, or I and my husband will leave you forever.”

They all accused the king, and the human swell surged to the palace to bring Satourann to make amends to the great Ziris.

Nemeith, who was slipping out of the temple in the tumult, was recognized as a Scythian who had escaped the sacrifices. A hundred arms carried him up and carried him in triumph through the city. The office of the Ziris had retained its prestige. She always inspired superstitious fear and immense love.

Chapter XXVIII

The king of kings was now not as pleased as his people with the choice his daughter had made. He knew well that she had not remained with Ptah at the bottom of the palace well; but he pretended to believe it. He had seen a part of his city overthrown by the wrath of the god, and he no longer despised the deity.

Nemeith, determined to tear the memory of Ziris from his heart, now remembered the offers he had made to the Cyclops’ daughter. He promised himself to go and fetch her in the cave of Our, if she was still

there, to take her back to Scythia. But, before leaving, he wished to keep his other promise to Mouza the jewel-swallower.

Kayo-Marath's widow was observing the mourning-period for her husband. The windows of his palace were bricked up. As soon as she heard that Nemeith was in the city, she sent for him.

He came. "Here is the scalp of your old man," he said; "I promised you, I bring it to you now".

She accepted the gift and hung it on the wall; then, with an air of casual indifference, she said: "He had little hair, and you have a profusion of it. He was old and you are young. He was ugly and you are beautiful. You have killed him and you come, according to the custom of your tribe, to offer your life in exchange for his. I forgive you, stay with me."

"Mouza, I'm not coming here to share your bed. I don't like jewel-eaters."

"Say rather that you find me ugly, since Hanaid disfigured me. But I will do to her what she has done to me."

"By my axe, you will not! If you want to die swiftly now, you have only to touch it; you know if I keep my word."

"Oh wrathful Rooster! I also keep my oaths, and I have sworn by the tomb of Osiris that Hanaid would die by my hand."

"Huh. If I killed you right away, it would save me the trouble of coming back. But Hanaid is beyond your reach, and when she is in my land, you just try to come and get her there. You'd only fill your belly with our stones, there are so many of them, and die yourself."

He set out, and three days later he was in the ravine of Our. On entering the cave, he found Hanaid alone. Hu-gadarn had been fishing in the

waterfall with Ized. The rest had been captured in a raid on the king's army. Nemeith was informed of Thor's departure for Scythia, with a blinded Amazon warrior serving as his guide.

The Cyclops' daughter then quietly asked: "Alone?"

"Yes. The Ziris is dead to Thor and to me. Here I am asking you to be my wife."

"Is Ziris dead? Is that why you come back? You remembered me and I am happy about it, Nemeith. I consent to be yours."

And as a pledge she gave him a kiss. Hu-gadarn and Ized were entering at this moment. The runner Ized swooped and leaned on the precious girl to keep her from swooning.

"He's my fiance!" gasped the daughter of the Cyclops, as she looked up in to the eyes of Ized.

Later Nemeith, pressed with questions about Ziris, had much to say, and yet he spoke at length only of the monsters and plagues that beset Atlantis, and of the darkness that had beset the capital.

The next day, cries from the ravine made them run to arms.

"It is my father's voice," cried Hanaid. It was indeed Bolkai, followed by many servants and hired men. After the first moments of cautious joy, the Cyclops informed his daughter that King Satourann had pardoned the Scythians and indeed all of them, in order to please the great and untouchable Ziris. Hanaid had nothing more to fear and could return to Sisparis.

In the middle of the celebratory supper, Nemeith raised his full cup and said to the Cyclops: "The rooster-haired, chief of the tribe of Nemeith, who has no less than forty thousand warriors under his standards, asks

to replace the son who has been taken from you. Give me your daughter for a wife".

Bolkai looked at Hanaid with surprise; but as she approved of Nemeith's words, he nodded his head in assent.

Nemeith continued: "Hanaid, it is customary to make a gift to the young bride-to-be; but I have neither Atlantis nor the land of your to offer you, for you are worth all that."

"That would be too much; give me your word, speak in front of all here" she replied.

"I promise you," replied the Rooster. He emptied his cup, filled it again, and passed it to the young Atlantean; she drank and put her hand in his.

This was enough for the barbarian Nemeith to consider Hanaid pledge-bound as his wife; but Bolkai was civilisaed and saw in this only a legal promise. Her father desired that the marriage should be officially celebrated at Sisparis, according to the rites of Ptah, great Ziris would consecrate their union. Nemeith trembled at this thought, and asked if his will and Hanaid's were not enough. The Cyclops replied in the negative. Nemeith resigned himself and consented to leave the next day.

Hu-gadarn, thinking the moment favourable in turn offered Ized the chance to become his adopted son.

"Chief with coarse hair," Ized said, "I am touched by this mark of friendship. But it is enough for me to have galloped on my back behind you, harpooned silvery fish in your company, and borrowed your bearskin against the cold of the nights. I cannot accept you as my father." Then, turning to Nemeith he said: "Rooster! the day I saved you all at Civa's house. You promised me a wish."

“What? Is it then to become the second wife of Nemeith that you refuse me?” asked Hu-gadarn, puzzled.

Nemeith laughed and said “I want no second-wife, Hu-gadarn. Ized, say now what you wish.”

“I would not like to leave the one who is going to be your companion, your property, your bed-mate.”

“Ah. I see. Well, if Hanaid consents, why should I refuse you?” Nemeith agreed.

The runner came to kiss his hand to thank him. He then knelt before the young bride, and, bending his forehead to the ground, he took her foot and placed it on her head, saying: Nemeith is your master, and I am your eternal servant”.

Hu-gadarn, feeling his magificent offer despised by Ized, grumbled sodely. Within the hour he was packed and had set out for his plains.

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Three days later, Nemeith had his skin adorned with his finest paintings, his hair precicely stacked in a fine cox-comb, and then slung a burnished axe and at his side. So presented and holding the Cyclops’ daughter by the hand, he climbed the steps of the great temple in the capital of Atlantis.

All the relatives and Cyclops men of Bolkai had made it a point of honour to be present at the wedding of Hanaid, the scrawny little girl they had seen grow to be the beauty with the eyes of a gazelle.

The Ziris received the betrothed the couple in a low room, made them sit on a bed placed under a statue of the god of flames, and poured the oil of banishment-of-evil on their heads. She was pale and her hand

trembled; Nemeith was paler still. She placed before them a lemon, honey, a lotus, a jujube, a quince, a white grape, and seven myrtle berries on a wooden dish.

"Take and eat these first-fruits of the earth, your mother, and may Ahura Mazda remove from you the wicked Angramanyu, and give you health, long days, and a posterity that is ever on the tongues of men."

Bolkai took a white stick and broke it, saying to Nemeith: I give you my rights over my daughter: she must follow you everywhere, belong to you alone, and if she fails in her duties, you can kill her, without my being able to prevent you."

One of the temple-maids cut off a lock of Hanaid's hair and rent his bride's tunic. Meanwhile, relatives and friends invoked upon this couple all the blessings of the gods of heaven, earth, and water. The flutes, tambourines, and rattlesnakes made the air resound. The Cyclops gave five sacks of beans, two of wheat, and a medimnus of gold dust to the Virgins of Fire, who accompanied the bride and groom to the door of their home.

The untouchable Ziris went to hide her tears at the back of the sanctuary.

There was an open table for the feast, and even the vast gardens of the Cyclops could scarcely contain the numerous guests. King Satourann himself deigned to honour with his presence the dwelling of his finest blacksmith, and congratulated him in a whisper on marrying his daughter to the chief of forty thousand such roosters.

Among the presents received by the young couple was a golden casket which attracted the admiration of all. When Hanaid opened it, a viper slid instantly out: it was Mouza's gift. Ized the runner, waiting on his lady at table, flung it away, chased it as it fled and crushed it with his bare heel.

Dances, meals, songs and ceremonies! The ceremonies lasted three days. A group of young girls represented in a dance the wheeling of the stars through the sky. One of them was particularly distinguished by her lightness, strength and grace. She jumped, turned, and pirouetted for two hours without catching her breath. Nemeith recognized in her Gorgo, whom he had met one night, carrying a tiny corpse.

He also gave the dance of his tribe. In this he advanced in the midst of a circle of girls who, at his recommendation, were giggling and gubbling like chickens. He waved his arms like wings, jumped, scratched the ground, stood as if on his dewclaws, and imitated the crowing of the rooster. Strutting around, he approached Gorgo, took her by the neck and kissed her. The young girl shuddered under this sudden attack, looked at him with her flaming eyes, and bit him on the lips.

Nemeith attached no more importance to this wild beast's kiss than to his own, which was part of the cock's dance, and which, by chance, had fallen on Gorgo.

Chapter XXIX

Ized had now understood that Nemeith was marrying Hanaid out of desperation, and that Hanaid had accepted him only out of resignation. Ized wanted to take advantage of his discovery. The day after the wedding, she made such strange speeches to the young bride that Hanaid considered her to be struck with madness, and threatened her with the wrath of Nemeith.

Ized went to the garden to cry with rage and shame. Nemeith found him lying in the grass, and asked him the cause of her pain.

"I wish I were dead," Ized said, "I have neither relatives nor friends; I'm like a stray dog. All I can do is run fast and pant my breath, like a dog.

Hanaid kept me out of compassion, but she does not return the affection I have for her. No one loves me, and it seems I can love no one. I will go away and start again. Now. The setting sun not find me under the roof that shelters one who I love and has no love for me." Ized jumped up and fled as fast as only he could run.

Thus Ized was not present to protect Hanaid from the wiles of Mouza. Mouza had contrived to know many things, despite not venturing forth from her house due to her disfigurement. Her new and wily black slaves had discovered more. Now they broght news that the Cyclops was at his forge and deep in a new mastering of a weapon, and that Nemeith had suddenly thought the day the fiest to go hunting and to kill and roast a deer. A written message was sent in the forged hand of a trusted servent: "My lady, Nemeith is dead, a boar has killed him. Come and raise his corpse from the hunting-wood on the hillside. The Foresters will guide you from the pale-gates."

An hour later, panting and exhausted, Nemeith's wife fell at the foot of a huge tree deep in the forest. Here the hunters traditionally made their midday meal, but there it was yet early and there was no-one. "Where were the forester and the corpse of her husband?" she thought in her agony. At the same moment, a veiled Mouza and her new black slaves sprang from beside the grassy track that led under the giant tree. Mouza ordered: "Let Mrytiou, the guardian of the corpses, fall upon you, and may Rudra pierce you with his poisonous arrows! If you do not seize this wicked beast now!"

Mouza had Hanaid tied to the trunk of the tree and roughly tore off her clothes. The girl's white flesh seemed to glow amid the gloom cast by the tree's dense boughs. Then, taking a thong-whip from her slave, Mouza whipped off a shred of flesh. "This little dainty is only to whet my appetite," she said, laughing and flicking at the wound with her finger.

Hanaid wept with rage and grief; but the wood was too far from any dwelling for cries to be heard. Mouza struck the girl until she grew hot with the effort, and each blow left a bloody furrow on the white skin of her victim.

Hanaid rebelled against being seen to be suffering, and, to spite her enemy, began to try to sing. Mouza in a fury seized the cutlass of a slave. Hanaid was still singing and louder. "Daughter of misfortune, I will repay you for what you have done to me! Now I'm going to split your cheek and pretty lips."

And just as the iron blade-edge slighly brushed the girl's face, a tiger, attracted by the smell of blood and sounds, leapt before the ferocious Mouza. She drew back, the slaves fled. The wild beast lowered to spring but then crawled forward for a better position; his huge jaws cracked and his eyes, shining as if with lightning, locked deep into those of Mouza. The latter could not bear the alien brilliance, she began to turn around to flee; but the tiger lithely jumped on her shoulders, and with a bite of his teeth crushed the skull. Mouza fell, uttering a cry so terrible that it was later said that it was heard from Sisparis. The animal rent and devoured the hag before Hanaid's eyes, then came and lay down at her feet, yawned, idly looked at her with a replete air, licked its paws and fell asleep.

The Cyclops's daughter was dumb with horror. To call for his help was to awaken this terrible companion. To break her bonds was impossible, her strength was broken under the blows and bleeding, and yet she did not lose all hope. She prayed in a low voice: "Varuna, god of heaven, I receive this punishment as a punishment for my faults; let thy power be recognized, O thou who has sustained me in sorrow. You helped me not to complain to that daughter of Angramanyu, and you reduced her to nothing. Let me live, you who humble the strong and lift up the weak. Remove from me this dreadful beast, the instrument of your divine justice. I will take all my care to please him whom you have given me for a husband, and forget all others".

In spite of herself, however, in her fever the memory of the mighty Thor still came to assail her. She saw herself carried back in the past to the day when he had accepted hospitality in her house, and had thanked her for it with a kiss under the tall trees of his garden.

The tiger rose up, muscles rippling and tail rising... her fever-dreams flew away. He approached, she closed her eyes, and thought she felt his sharp teeth penetrate her flesh. She uttered a cry and fainted.

Chapter XXX

When she regained consciousness, she found herself surrounded by relatives and friends; she was on her bed. Her father looked at her with big tears in his eyes. Nemeith was sitting in the sun on the doorstep, and the tiger's skin was lying spread at his feet.

"Take care!" she cried, "the tiger!"

"I have killed him, and now his fierceness only warms my feet" replied Nemeith.

"No no! he feasts on the blood of Mouza, he cracks her bones; he devours her entrails; cast him out, for now he is leaping upon me..." Fever again took possession of her, and her condition was soon judged hopeless by the Hakamins who practiced medicine at Sisparis. They suspected the thong-tips of Mouza has been tainted by a slow poison in some way.

Hanaid's mind was evidently stricken. However, she finally roused enough to understand that Nemeith, who was hunting in the woods, had no luck in hunting. Thus he had gone to the noon-tree a little early, arriving in time to scare off and kill the tiger.

The Ziris, saddened by the imminent loss of this girl who had shared her dangers, came to bring her consolation.

“Priestess of Ptah,” Hanaid murmured, “you who know how to read hearts, look into mine, and see the evil you have done me!”

She then asked her father’s forgiveness for not having been able to prevent her brother’s death.

“I do not accuse you,” replied the Cyclops; “die in peace, if that be the will of Ptah.”

She thanked him and kissed his hands.

Then, rising on her couch, she called Nemeith, and said: “I feel better and want to get up. Help me. I want to go and die in the garden, if I must die.” Her husband motioned to one of the attendants to lift here and he helped her out. And when in the garden, in a low voice she added for him alone:

“Listen”, she said. “The day you spoke to me of love in the cave, you knew that I loved Thor, and although he had killed my brother, I would not have renounced him if he had not despised me. I gave myself to you out of anger at him; but you have shown yourself gentle and kind to me, and I would have been contemptible not to transfer my affection to you. But I could never forget Thor. I have been an unfaithful wife from the heart. Forgive me, Nemeith; but your friend was to me the equal of a god. It was here that I received a first kiss from him, the only one, alas! It is here that I want to die thinking of him... Look, here it is! he comes back to me to return his love to me.

She rose with help, then took three steps on her own, into the grass, uttered a cry, and fell dead in the midst of the flowers.

The dead wife was placed on a linen sheet, and her wounds cleaned and closed by the priests. Dressed and clean as if for a feast day, Hanaid's body was burned in the presence of all his family, and her ashes deposited in the sanctuary of the Cyclops' house.

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It was told, one year later, by hunters coming into the city with their haul of fine skins, that they had found Ized the runner in the old cave. The cave he had shared with Hanaid. Ized was found there dead and had hung himself from the neck, with a long loop of fine braid made of the hair of Hanaid. A juniper fire circle lay at his winged feet, a faint layer of ashes like a portal to a misty underworld. Everything else in the cave was in darkness and silence. The hunters shuddered and called the cave accursed and would say no more.

Chapter XXXI

Nothing now held Nemeith to Atlantis. He took leave of Bolkai and set out alone for his homeland. The journey was long, there were deserts to cross, and even the sturdy horse given to him by his father-in-law fell exhausted. He had no more precious stones left to procure another, but he relied on fate and on the king's allies who still held the field. He walked all the first night without a horse.

The next day he saw an encampment, that of Arhimaz, and slipped like a fox along the palisades. Horses, their feet shackled, grazed the grass. One of them, with a black robe, a bushy mane like a lion's, hocks stretched like ballistae, a fierce eye, and quivering nostrils, arrested the attention of Nemeith.

“This steed will carry me to my tribe,” he said, going to hide himself in the undergrowth. He saw Arhimaz jump on this horse, it was his! He rode out without an escort.

“I’ll have the beast before nightfall”, thought the rooster, crowing inwardly to himself. He had followed Arhimaz at a distance, let him enter the woods at a light trot and caught him up with all the speed of his legs. He leaped up on the horse’s back and clasped the man’s neck with his powerful hands to stifle any cries. Arhimaz slumped sideways as Nemeith snatched out his sword and slightly prodded the horse with the point. The powerful black steed took the hint and had soon three hills, two valleys, and a stream away. On waking the king sought to shake Nemeith off with sudden movement. But endowed with superior strength, the barbarian bends the weakling like a reed and binds his hands even while riding, saying, “Rest, and thank me for not killing you.”

“What do you want from me, demon of the night?” asked the King.

“I only wanted your horse.”

“Then by the sun’s rays, release me! Look, my horse Aswa has no equal. His hooves are more hard as iron, and its hair shinier than an Egyptian shield. Keep this treasure-horse and cast me down to the earth.”

“No, I prefer to have you as a travelling companion. I want to take you to my land, where you can milk my mares.”

“Let me redeem myself, then. I will give you a hundred young virgins who will perform this office better than I.”

“Where are they?”

“Ride to my palace and see.”

“Yes, I will go with you there, but... on my way back from my land with all my tribe!”

As he spoke confidently thus, they were surrounded by a large number of Amazons. “Ah!” said Nemeith wryly. “The virgins are here already. But I see they are of the wrong type”.

Nemeith, who knew that he was admired by the Amazons, named himself.

Arthemis, whom he had not seen, came forward from among her warriors.

“Ah! it’s you, Rooster! I was not looking for you, but now I find you. You were forbidden ever to present yourself before me again. I could cut out your eyes,” she said, riding up close and digging her nails into his chest.

Nemeith replied without anger: “Then I shall regret not to see your eyes ever again.”

“You are a coward, the most cowardly of men,” she rasped.

“By God the Father! You have lied about me, Arthemis.” Then, addressing the warrior girls he said: “Have I given any proof of cowardice before you?”

“No, no,” replied the Amazons, bound to speak the truth.

The queen imposed silence on them and said: “Because a wicked one stands on his dewclaws and crows, you are all giggling for him like his chickens.”

One of them replied: “One does not treat a valiant leader of thousands as badly as you do, and we all esteem him.”

Arthemis paused and continued: “Rooster, what do you have hidden under your sleeping-skin?” Have you still the daughter of King Satourann in your power? Give me back my slave, thief!”

Nemeith burst out laughing and said to her: “The great Ziris is back in Atanor and truly wedded to her fiery husband-god, and what I have here... is the king of Our!”

“Arhimaz?” cried all the Amazons.

“Yes, Arhimaz whom I am taking prisoner back to my land. When my people see him, they will be eager to march on his lands”.

Arthemis was quick to see the deal. “You have stolen a slave from me, now give me back this king,” cried Arthemis, “and I will try to forget your insults.”

“Hmmm, well now. Provided you don’t kill him?”

“No, I want to make him my ally.”

“Really? Very well.”

Nemeith dragged off the king by his hair and slung him on the riderless pack-horse of an Amazon. The Amazon was flattered at being chosen, and spoke some words to Nemeith.

Arthemis was not satisfied. “You have doubly offended me, I want more.”

“Light of the night! What do I need to do to get your forgiveness? Do you want hair? Scalps are the best gifts you can give each other as warriors. The enemy is not far off, I will go and get you some.”

“Hair!” she said, with eyes shining with desire; “Yes, I want a hundred!”

“You shall have them. But... say at once that you want to have me killed in this way. Have you ever scalped a hundred warriors in one night? Come, you are pulling my leg.”

But she was not jesting with him. She knew his capabilities and she sought to use him - if only briefly - in the war with the invaders.

Soon Nemeith, taking advantage of the darkness, ventured alone towards the entrenchments of Kais and Arhimaz, who had established their wary camps twenty parasangs from that of the Amazons. The horse Aswa covered this distance in less than three hours. It bounded like a deer and seemed to fly rather than run through the night. Nemeith no longer regretted the loss of dear Asp.

He found the Arhimaz camp was in turmoil. The warriors, equipped with torches, galloped through the woods and the marshland, calling for their lost king. When they recognized his horse being ridden by Nemeith, some ran at him. He soon pierced three of them; the others turned away. This was not what Nemeith wanted. He chased them and threw two others on the ground. Five hairs were already adorning Aswa’s chest when he appeared before their hasty palisades. By his shouts of defiance, he drew the warriors out of the camp; they rushed upon him to the number of forty. The night was dark, but Nemeith saw in the darkness like the owls; he struck the hairy ungainly soldiers with his terrible strength, while the men called stiffly away their night-fires, often attacked each other in the darkness. Twenty of them had bitten into the dust when Nemeith suddenly disappeared.

The commanders on the walls, no longer glimpsing the foe and supposing him routed, ordered the men returned to the tents, postponing until the next day the care of burying his dead. But Nemeith left his horse in a thicket and returned at a wolf’s pace to harvest another thirty hairs. When he returned to the camp of Arthemis, it was daylight.

He found the queen had invited the captive king of to eat with her. They were sitting on the ground, under the tree of war, in the midst of the Amazons, horses, and dogs.

“King,” said Arthemis, “you wanted to take my kingdom, and now I can take yours; you are in my power and I can kill you, but I will give you your life if you want to make an alliance with me against Satourann of Atlantis.” This king of kings is very powerful, as you know. He will be less so if you abandon the banners of Atlantis.

“Let Arthemis withdraw her Amazons from my kingdom” he replied with forethought already given to the matter. “Give me as hostages a hundred of your warrior virgins for my Gynaecium, and I will abandon to you the plains of Eleuzine as far as the mountains of Our.”

“You would give me what I already have,” she replied, shrugging her shoulders contemptuously. “Besides, you must know that Arthémis does not receive conditions, she imposes them.”

“By the pillars of heaven! I can do no better. More, and my own people would tear me down and refuse to fight Atlantis”.

“If so, I will do better,” cried the Amazon. And with a blow of her axe she cut off his head.

“Ah. I did not hand over Arhimaz to you to kill him,” said Nemeith as he approached.

“Are you going to reproach me for dealing as I like with such a small gift? Now you’d better have kept your other promise.”

“I have”.

And then Arthemis, placing the king's head at the end of her spear, brandished it in the air, crying to the Amazons: "To the enemy! to the hair!" They jumped on their naked horses and roared down on the camps of Arhimaz and Kais. Seeming faster than their javelins, they reached the goal. The soldiers of trembled at the sight of their king's head. Arthemis sprang from her horse, gripped wood and climbed up through the palisades. The defensive lines of wagons were broken, and the torrent of warrior girls stopped only in front of the elephants of Kais. The queen, knowing the terror that these mountains of flesh inspired in the horses, ordered them to dismount. They fought without truce or mercy. Kais saw his mammoths, of which he was so proud, roll over in the dust and crush his brilliant archers in their fall; he rallied the rest and retreated bitterly.

This day, sparked by the actions of the lone Nemeith, delivered up to the Amazons the whole country of Our.

In the evening, Nemeith brought a bundle of bloody trophies back to a soft spot in the forst, cut a rough shelter and fell asleep. He was awakened by Arthemis, who, with folded arms and standing in a moonbeam, called out to him thus: "Do you think you deserve my forgiveness by boasting of impossible things? Let me see the scalps you promised me. Come, get up!"

"Go away. By Heimdall! you are not generous to reproach me thus after only a little sleep." But we took handfuls of hairs and spread them at the feet of the ferocious young girl. She jumped on it with as much avidity as Mousa would have jumped on jewels.

"Count them," said Nemeith.

She counted them, and, beaming with joy, exclaimed: "Rooster! there are a hundred! You are a man and I am happy."

"Doesn't that deserve a kiss?"

“For a hundred!” she replied, throwing herself into his arms. “I love you! and woe to him who would dare to dispute with me.”

Nemeith, surprised at this amorous transport, said to her, laughing: “I suspected that you were a woman, and I am proud to have conquered your pride, but I have never wished for anything but your friendship. A warrior like you stands great before a warrior; but love is to be feared.”

“Why?” said the Amazon. “Are you afraid of anything, you, the brave of the brave?”

“I am afraid that by dint of commanding women you will forget that I am a man. I want to be the red rooster that crows atop the Ygdrasill ash-tree, not the plump pig that prowls at the foot to root out mushrooms.”

“Rooster, then stay with me and be my brother-in-arms. As you are Thor’s. My friendship will give you confidence in my love.”

“Do you intend to take me as your husband, if I accept?”

“Maybe.”

This answer did not satisfy Nemeith. He wanted to deal on an equal footing with the beautiful but unpredictable Amazon, and it was not fitting for him to be only her passing favourite.

She saw his pride, and withdrew, irritated. But in love. Taking away the hairs, she made a bed of them and fell asleep atop the bloody trophies, expecting soon to overcome the distrust of him whom she loved.

Chapter XXXII

The next day, an Amazon was tied to the tree of war, by order of Arthemis. She had the tongue cut out for speaking to Nemeith out of her presence. it was the Amazon who's pack-horse Nemeith had chose for the king. When he learned the cause of this punishment, he ran to his fierce friend and threatened to leave her. She spoke louder than he, and went so far as to strike him. He despised her blows, called her a woman, and deftly caught and tied her hands. She suffered this affront, humbled herself, and promised to be more humane. But that same evening, one of her Amazons having smiled Nemeith as she passed by him, she waited until he had gone away, and struck the young girl with a poisoned dart. Nemeith was told of this and turned from the Amazon in disgust. The next day, taking advantage of a hunt in the woods, he threw his horse Aswa through the tight ravines and precipices, and set out for his home, hoping never to return.

Aswa soon crossed the plains of Eleuzine. Nemeith took pleasure in testing his great vigour, and was delighted to find that the horse also had a nose for water in these dry plains.

"Aswa," he cried, "cut through the wind, devour space, take me quickly to the land of free men. Aswa, thou whose hoofs make lightning flash in the dark night, let us leave these accursed plains where only stones grow, let us run to the rich pastures of my home, thou mayest graze there without bowing thy head; a horse like you must eat standing up like a warrior when the enemy approaches. Aswa, you will be my friend. Take me far away from the cruel Amazon warrior, away from the sweet unapproachable Ziris, away from everything, away from myself and back to myself."

He had passed the mountains of Our, when he stopped to take a little rest under a rock. He tied the bridle of his horse on his arm, so that it could neither be taken from him nor run away. He slept.

Sobs from a brush beside him woke him before daylight. "Who weeps like that?" he asked. He was not answered, but all was silent. He

thought it was the cry of some animal, and seized his axe. Fresh groans convinced him that it was a human being. He approached cautiously, and, in the darkness, laid his hand on a woman: she was lying face down; he raised her up and asked: "What is the cause of your pain? Speak, and if I can bring any relief, I will do it."

"I seem to recognize you by the voice," she answered; Are you not the with the Rooster?

"You said it."

"You don't recognize me, then?"

"By the Steppe Wind! It is too dark. Who are you?"

"I am Myrrhine."

"Ah, the beautiful Amazon girl who slept in front of the hut where the Ziris was imprisoned, I almost killed you."

"Man! you ought to have done it, you would have been spared from being a traitor out of friendship for you, and Arthemis would not have committed a cowardly action by gouging out my eyes. I am blind and a beggar now."

"Myrrhine, then I am the cause of your misfortune. I offer you an asylum in my tribe and I will take care of you."

"I will no longer see your flaming hair, but I will hear the sound of your voice, and it will be consolation. I agree."

At daylight Nemeith took her in on the back of the horse, and Aswa continued the furious course. The Amazon asked him if he had a magic steed.

Six days later they entered the mountains of Kaf, crossed them, and stopped in the vast grassy plains strewn with great swamps and clumps of woods. Warriors could be seen hunting curlews and cormorants and other water-birds in the mist.

Nemeith made the air ring with the cock-call shout. Immediately, in the midst of the forage, to the right, to the left, on all sides, and even far away on the steppes, thousands of horsemen brandished their weapons, shouting with joy. Also shouting like cocks, they ran to meet him.

“Look at my warriors, how great and strong they are,” he said to Myrrhine.

“You forget that everything is dark for me.”

They were soon riding proudly into the midst of the principal village of his tribe: thousands of leather tents supported by long poles, and rows of wooden carts covered with wicker, which served to carry the camp. Thor was not there.

On seeing the golden-haired chief, the girls and women who were spinning wool or preparing the evening meal left their chores, adorned themselves with a feather or a flower, and came to meet him; half-naked children cease to roll, fight, and frighten the fowl in an attempt to imitate the cry of chickens; the young men, who bowed the heads of draught oxen under the yoke, abandon their work; those who were bringing back the herds scattered in the pastures speed up their march, and their cries of joy excite the red dogs that bark at the legs of the neighing horses.

The warriors and elders, who have been covering their faces and bodies with their festive paintings, return with the ensigns of the nation to acclaim their leader.

The whole tribe of the gives itself up to the dance, after which sheep were slaughtered and wine-skins passed around.

In the middle of the meal, Nemeith, who had made Myrrhine sit down beside him, took her by the hand and, pointing to her told the assembly: "She who has been plunged into darkness for having helped me, to fulfil the duties of friendship, has a right to the esteem of warriors and the pity of women. I do not think I'm doing too much for her by adopting her for my sister. Do you promise to protect and respect my choice?

The whole tribe cried out to him, "Yes!"

Myrrhine, trembling, says: "The honour of having you for a brother is worth the light of day to me." She seized the hand which Nemeith held out to her, and tried to raise it to her lips, but she sank down on the grass. Deprivation in the mountains, shame, great sorrow, and now this too great happiness had killed her.

Chapter XXXIII

On hearing of the death of Arhimaz and the retreat of Kais, the king of kings resolved to march against the Amazons and to recover the new-won lands from them. Resupplied and re-armed he pressed forward, when he head ill tidings from his rear. Thor was advancing at great speed on the capital Sisparis with fifty thousand men. The King immediately sent heralds to ask Thor the cause of his 'visit'.

Thor replied by the heralds: "Let Satourann give me his daughter Ziris for a wife, and my warriors will rally to his standards."

While waiting for the answer, Thor pitched his tents under the walls of the city. The king, torn between the Scythians and the Amazons, took desperate measures and rousted out King Surtur. Surtur was still recoving from his grievous injuries and who had not taken part in the war, but he could still place a hundred thousand Couschites under arms. The king of Cos had not left the city of the Atlanteans, for their healers

were the finest. When King Satourann appeared before him, he was lying back on his couch. His dull eyes lay back in their sockets, his nostrils were clenched, the bones of his face protruded under his black and taut skin, and all this gave him the appearance of an evil mummy. He was surrounded by fawning eunuchs and playing with small dogs.

A few paces from him, a girl was chained by the neck to a block of granite; it was the fat Purusha from Civa's villa, whose spirited fighting-back from a tabletop had taken the eye of Sutur, to his later ruin when she had mutilated him after the chariot crash. Now she was fat no longer. Her pale face and broad chest bore many traces of the blows she had received in her captivity.

Satourann would have liked to speak without witnesses to the king of Cos; but the latter replied that he had no secret from Purusha.

"If this is your concubine," said the king of Atlantis, "she must not hear what I have to say to you about the Ziris."

"Purusha is not jealous, speak." Satourann renewed his assurance of marriage, although Ziris had again devoted herself to Ptah, and begged him to lend assistance against the Scythians and Amazons.

Surtur replied with sly reluctance: "I do not wish to draw the wrath of the god upon myself further by taking from him his priestess, his wife."

"What!" cried Satourann, "is it really the fiery Surtur who speaks thus? Will you see, without quivering with rage, the woman whom I wish to give you for a wife become the prey of a barbarian? O most cowardly of kings! You abandon at the moment when your help is most necessary to me, and that for shameful pleasures in a harem."

Surtur smiled wickedly, took his whip and struck Purusha with it several times. "My pleasures are my own to choose. That's how I love her," he said, "that's it".

“King of Cos, what crime has this lady committed to ill-treat her in this way?”

Surtur said a single word: Satourann drew back terrified and, addressing Purusha: “your vengeance causes me too much harm for me to let you live.”

He summoned his servants, and, without asking Surtur’s permission, he had the Purusha conducted to the palace before him, with six men hefting the granite block that still held her. She expected to be flayed alive or to drink a muid of molten lead. However, this was not the case. The king had her brought to his Gynaecium, uncertain whether he would keep her there and perhaps bargain for her or take her life.

But Purusha had been one of the most beautiful and voluptuous daughters of Sisparis, and she was so eloquent now that the King not resist listening to her.

“King of kings,” she said to him, prostrating herself and offering many sweet words. Then she said: “I have taken away the strength and courage of your ally; but if I deliver you from your enemy, will you not pardon me? I know how this can be done.”

Satourann said to her: “I could have my Cyclops loose you from your chain, yes. And then if you bring me the head of the Scythian, which I want badly now, then I will preserve you forever from the vengeance of Surtur. But you are in my realm and my spies see much. If you betray me, nothing will save you. Tell me of your plan, and I will risk it.”

Purusha was washed and dressed and set out for the camp of the barbarians. She made herself known to Herser, and easily penetrated through to Thor. Supposing her an accomplished high-class pleasure-woman of the city, he took and idle fancy to her and let her come and go. “Perhaps she is a spy, perhaps not,” he mused.

In the evening he found her in the tent that had been given to her. In the middle of the night, seeing him asleep, she got up and took up the blade that had been given by Ziris to the Scythian. But, unskilled in handling this weapon and in the dark, she struck him with the flat of the axe. Thor, suddenly awakened, punched her on the head, bound her with ropes, and snatched the truth from her stunned head.

The next day the head of Purusha was carried to the king of kings with a summons to deliver the Ziris forthwith to the Scythian chief, and to send no more spies. Receiving only vague answers, Thor was enraged and plundered the suburbs and placed himself in the way of Kais, who was returning with the remnants of his army. At the same time, he sent emissaries to Arthemis to march on Atlantis. Hearing the news, the Amazon sent sixty thousand warriors, but commanded them to wait for her to come herself.

Satourann had not enough people to resist so many enemies. He gathered all his leaders and wise-men together and told them of the situation. It was decided that the Scythian's conditions should be accepted, that the people should be informed of them, and that a thousand virgins should be thrown into the volcano to replace the Ziris and placate the divine husband.

But the mass of the nation rose up and protested, accusing the king and his counsellors of impiety towards Ptah, whose rights were disregarded and whose power was despised.

Satourann begged his daughter to come into the palace; but she was shut up in the temple as in a citadel. She refused to ratify her father's choice, and threatened him with the wrath of the god of Fire.

The Aces, the Eris, the Antes, and the Pelasgians took up her cause, and rose up. and went to the palace.

Thor and his barbarian horde were then summoned by the king. They knew nothing of Ptah, and his supporters were standing in the way of Thor's wishes. United with the remnants of the army of Kais, they suppressed the rebellion. The blood of the fervent worshippers of Ptah flowed through the streets; the prisons overflowed and the executioners took turns in all the squares of Sisparis. The number of corpses became so enormous that it was no longer sufficient to burn them. Plague broke out in the city and struck indiscriminately both the executioners and the victims.

The priests of Mithras were moved by this. Xizouthros, the magician, went to Saturann and said "King of kings! let Angramanyu, the ill-intentioned one, who has breathed madness into you, depart from you; set your subjects free. Put an end to useless massacres and repent. I will beg your forgiveness. The time is near when everything you see before your eyes will no longer exist. A sea without shore and without bottom will sweep over and replace your city and your proud palace. Our volcano-god himself will be swallowed up and quenched, such that future generations will not even have an idea that Atlantis ever existed. All will perish and be lost."

Satourann did not heed his threats, since Xizouthros would not say how he learned such wild prophecy. He imposed, as a condition of pardon, that the Ziris should leave the sanctuary of Ptah and come, in the presence of the whole court and the Scythian chiefs also , to give her hand to Thor.

Ziris lowered her head and answered by message: "If Ptah strikes you, blame it only for your obstinacy: in ten nights I will be in the palace."

Satourann and Thor considered themselves satisfied.

Thor became patient then, and made an alliance with Saturann, and sent word to Arthemis that she must remain in her new-won kingdom. The latter, unaccustomed to being given orders, did just the opposite. Three

days later it passed the Phleget and gave battle; only to see it re-taken the next day, and her retreating army pursued by the united troops of Satourann, Thor, and Kais. Arthemis swore to punish the treachery of the Scythian. The king of kings now wanted to follow the Amazons and reconquer the land of Our at once. The Scythian refused to even think on such things before his wedding, and the chance was lost.

On the same day, Ziris secretly sent two of her temple-maids to Nemeith, calling for him to come to her assistance.

Chapter XXXIV

When the time set expired, Ziris still had no news from Nemeith. She now devoted herself to her sticken people and when the time camewent to the palace. Her temple-maids dressed in black, with their hair untied as if for a funeral ceremony, followed her, crying, "Woe! three times woe!"

The king and his ally Kai, Thor and his companion Herser, the court and the army all awaited the new wife on the top of the platform.

The population, now reduced by a third, instead of stamping its feet of joy, as before, clustered around gloomy and desolate and hoped for crusts from the feast.

On the occasion of his daughter's wedding, Satourann had placed on the porphyry staircase prisoners, rebels, men, women, and children, tied back to back and chained to iron rings sealed in each step. Executioners stood near them and were to massacre them at the moment when the king broke the white rod as a sign of the union of the bride and groom.

The Ziris was climbing the hundred steps in the midst of these unfortunate victims, when a panting temple-maid, covered with dust, flew in and raised her arm in the direction of the Altai. A mass of

horsemen were on the sides of the mountain. Ziris put her hand to her heart, and in a burst of joy: “I knew that Nemeith had not forgotten me,” she said.

Thor knew now that he had been deceived, and the thirst for vengeance gripped him by the throat.

Saturann quickly thought of making a new ally of Nemeith. “Let us be politic,” he said unctiously. “He is surely here for the wedding of his friend, his ally. Better late than never!” The King gave orders that the gates of the city should be opened to the new arrival, and forty thousand followers of Nemeith, followed by twenty thousand Kimris commanded by Hu-gadarn, mingled with the Scythians. “Getae and Kimris, my allies,” cried the king through voice-trumpets as they all assembled, “welcome to Sisparis, and may Mithra-Sun, who has thrown one of his golden rays on the head of your chief, give us the victory over the Amazons.”

Nemeith climbed the hundred steps with the lightness of a bird, swinging his red rooster plume. His masculine face and broad chest were adorned with war paint. Ziris stretched out both arms towards him. Thor looked at her gloomily. Nemeith went straight to her, and, standing proudly with his spear he asked: “What danger threatens the high priestess? Has her fiery husband no longer the power to protect her?”

“The king my father despises Ptah.”

“Good. I also despise him.”

“He promised me to Thor.”

“This also seem good. Thor is my brother-in-arms, and I am glad to know that he is happy.”

“You’re lying!” said Thor, coming close and putting his hand down on Nemeith’s shoulder.

Nemeith met Ziris’s eyes and sighed: “Yes, I’m lying. I can love only Ziris.”

“Then you have been treacherous and disloyal to me.” Thor stepped back, snatched his spear from him and broke it on his knee. Nemeith turned pale and bit his lips until he bled.

“You are doing a great offense to a great warrior,” warned Hu-gadarn in a quiet voice.

But the Scythian completed the action, throwing the pieces of the spear over his shoulder: “I prefer it to be so. I break all pact with him!”

“Now I can breath. Your friendship suffocated me,” replied Nemeith. Then, turning to Ziris: “Now, my arms, my blood, my warriors are yours!”

“By the bones of the mountains” sword the Scythian, beside himself, “I will give you your lover’s head as a wedding present.”

“He who has struck such a god as Ptah with his axe fears nothing, and he alone will be my husband,” Ziris flashed back, eyes blazing.

“Come and fight then!” said Nemeith.

“Death!” replied the Scythian.

Kais approached the king as a confidant: “Let them kill themselves,” he wheedled as the two men faced off and their seconds conferred, “and their leaderless warriors will then retire to their steppes, and you will be rid of allies who have become your masters.”

“Do *you* want Ziris?” said Satourann.

“Yes, and I want to crush Scythia under the feet of my mammoths.”

Hu-gadarn and Herser were the seconds and they chose a level ground nearby and settled the conditions of the fight: with the iron axe until the death of a man.

The king, the court, the warriors of all nations formed an immense circle around the two adversaries, who were now naked to the waist,

The crowd parted like water and the untouchable Ziris came to Nemeith and said to him, “Soul of my life!” take my talisman, which preserves against death.

“Ziris, that would be cowardly; A warrior should fight only with the strength of his body.”

“But if you were to die!”

“Then we will meet again on the other side of life,” he said softly. “Listen, sweet brightness of my eyes! I ask you for a favour. If I am killed, do not let my body burn, as is the custom here in this stinking city. I have already told Hu-gadarn and my cocks to bury me in the fashion of my tribe, on the top of a hill, with my head turned towards the rising sun. You will be watchful of this.”

The young girl could not restrain her tears.

“Don’t cry, I’m still alive. I would have liked to do something else, but impossible here, in front of this crowd.”

“What is it, Nemeith?”

“After the fight,” she said, blushing and smiling.

This done, Ziris vanished into the parting crowd and Nemeith rushed joyfully into the middle of the arena.

The warriors gave the signal: the Scythians imitating the neighing of the horse, Nemeith the crowing of the cock, the Kimris the bellowing of the bull.

Thor and Nemeith rushed upon each other. Of more or less equal strength and skill, they were panting and covered with sweat before they had received a single wound.

“One of us is too much on this earth,” said Thor.

“The earth found room for you and me both.”

“I will drink your blood,” cried Thor.

The Scythian struck Nemeith in the face,

The latter parried the blow and said: “You would like to disfigure my handsome face; but Ziris would love me all the same.”

“Ziris? My bride!! I will marry her to make you die twice of rage and jealousy.”

Then Nemeith’s axe entered Thor’s chest, and Thor stepped back and slumped on his knees; but, in a supreme effort, he threw his weapon at full speed against his enemy: it opened his side. Ziris let out a heartrending cry.

“Rooster! you’ve had it now!” said Thor, rolling in the dust.

“This is nothing,” replied Nemeith. But the axe slipped out of his hands. He stood for a moment, looked at Ziris, tried to speak, and fell like a collapsing mountain.

The daughter of King Satourann rushed upon Nemeith, and, in the presence of all, with her mouth on his, took his last breath.

Ptah, angry with his unfaithful wife, again abandoned Sisparis. At the sight of such sacrilege, a cry of horror arose from among the Atlanteans. A noise like the crackling of the fire whistled in the air; the smoke which in the day issued from the volcano-temple Atanor, rose in a black cloud, hovered over the city, and dissipated.

Ziris dipped her hands in the blood of Nemeith, and marked with it on his forehead and breast. Then, raising her bloody arms, she cried to heaven, in an accent of despair: “I will fulfill your last wishes. Follow me!”

Herser picked up Thor, who, opening his eyes, asked where Nemeith was. “He is now treading the path of death,” replied Herser. Thor fell back motionless: he too was carried away.

Back at the palace, the King said to Kais: “Ptah gone, Nemeith and the Scythian dead, and King Surtur plays with his puppies. So the Ziris is yours.”

The king of the Ombos was still a fool and he ran the streets like a flapping duck to fetch his bride from the temple. But she was not there; she was burying her dear dead on the top of the hill where she had led the procession. Fires were lighted there; the warriors and the temple-girls, ranged around the body of the hero, sang of his praises and exploits. Ziris cut off the man’s golden braids, as was the custom.

The grave dug, the great chief was laid there with his arms. Those who regretted it the most tore their hair, covered themselves with earth while

howling softly, ploughed their bodies with sharp stones, and threw them back on the corpse. They then covered him with a long slab, and, after bringing and shooting his horse Aswa aside his grave, and covering it with turf, they retired in silence.

The temple-maidens carried off the Ziris, who could not believe that all was over.

A few days after, Thor, having been partly revived by the healing arts of the city, came to Sisparis to summon the king of kings to keep his promise to him. There was a great noise of feasting in the palace, and the Scythian entered the banqueting hall without being noticed.

Satourann was on his throne; his daughter, dressed in sumptuous clothes, the triple crown of the Atlantean queens on her forehead, looked like a dead woman, so pale and indifferent was she to what was going on around her.

Kais, standing with the cup in his hand, had his riches arranged before him, among others the twenty golden vessels of Surtur, which old Surtur had given him in exchange for a doctor who pretended to cure him of age.

Black King Surtur was also there, supported at the end of the table by his eunuchs and he had a tiny dog up on the table. His beard had fallen off, and his thinness was frightening. He drooled like a child. He, who had formerly been so jealous of obtaining a glance from the fairest woman in Atlantis, saw Ziris being taken from him by Kais. Surtur raised but a feeble laugh at the jest.

Kais now said: “I am the greatest king after Satourann; I possess all the elephants of the Nile and mammoths also; My archers, with arrows that precede the wind, are the first soldiers of the earth. Ziris, cast your eyes on your betrothed.”

He raised his cup and was about to drink, when Thor sprang like a tiger, and with a blow of his axe, broke it on his teeth. Kais fell upon his precious golden vessels, which he flooded with his black blood.

Satourann and the guests were stupefied to see the Scythian, whom they believed to be in the tomb with Nemeith. Was this the walking dead seeking vengeance? As the stunned Ombos fumbled for their bows, Thor utters his war-cry. Scythian hordes invade the hall like a torrent.

"I've come to fetch my wife," said Thor. And with a bound he was near the pale Ziris. With an axe at his throat and wine in his belly, King Satourann admitted anything, accepted anything. Kais' corpse was taken away.

Surtur looks at Thor without understanding; suddenly he stood up and says, stammering a little: "Scythian, do you not see that you are going to marry the goddess of death?

"No, she is Ziris!" says Thor, who mocks the black and returns some of the sarcasms with which he had once crushed him at the suitors' meal.

Surtur wanted to answer, but he was troubled and became the plaything of some nearby the barbarians. He is first pushed, then he is thrown back and forth like a ball. From insults to blows. The king of Cos is so dizzy he no longer knows but to groan; he falls, he is trampled underfoot: he is no more than a rag, he is nothing.

The King of Atlantis is no longer master of his own house, he leaves the banqueting hall by a little-known back way, swearing in a low voice to take revenge.

The Scythians then mingled with the Atlanteans at the table of the king of kings; they drank, they became drunker. The doors of the Gynaecium are broken down and his concubines and daughters were brought in to feast and be feasted upon. The cups are emptied and filled, and while

passions are unleashed within, thunder and storm rumble and whistle without.

Thor then siezed Ziris, who has hidden her head under her veils so as not to see what was going on around her. He considered her his property and he departed, and with her he gains the Tower of the Stars without knowing where he is going. Ziris wants to flee, but Thor… he closed the door behind him, and with his eyes on fire, his brain troubled by drunkenness, he advanced on her.

"Back!" she said; "you are drunk with the blood of Nemeith, and you horrify me."

"I killed him and you belong to me. Only I now love you and I want you," replied Thor, flexing his wrists. Thor then grasped her wrists of the sacred virgin and made her bend onto her knees.

"Hard-hearted Scythian, you make me call on Ptah!" Looking at the statue she called "Ptah!, have mercy on your wife!"

"I despise your god!" roared Thor. And he spat in the face of the idol with the eyes of enamel.

A frightful clap of thunder resounded, and the Tower of the Stars trembled to its base. Ziris, by a desperate movement, succeeded in freeing herself from the Scythian's grasp and threw herself back towards the door. But before she could open it, a sinister creak was heard, the wall parted, and the pavement of the hall came apart.

Thor, feeling himself slipping, held on to the statue of Ptah. At that very moment, half of the tower fell in one block on the gardens of the palace, filled with barbarians, dragging the Scythian leader with it.

Ziris, dumb with terror at the response of the God, remained clinging to the threshold of the door, which now opened onto the void. On all sides

the vertigo of the abyss. Below, the dead, the dying, cries, complaints, imprecations; Thor lying crushed under the statue of wrathful Ptah. Herser and a few warriors try in vain to lift the idol to snatch the corpse from under it.

Ziris felt the wall slowly leaning. An immense cry of pity rises to her lips; but who would dare to attempt to climb to save her? She lets the cry resounds, but it is now some tribesman who comes to her assistance. It is Nemeith himself!

Is she now a plaything of the wrath of Ptah, sent a last hopeless vision of her beloved as punishment? Does Ptah send the spectre of her love to lead her to down at last to the abode of shadows?

She calls him. He answers.

Chapter XXXVI

An hour after Hu-gadarn and Ziris had descended the hill after the funeral, a woman came out of the halls and approached the grave. With the help of a lever, she threw the tombstone aside, seized the corpse, and slid the slab back on the grave, so that no one might notice this violation.

She loaded the body in its wrappings on her surprisingly strong shoulders, although it was heavy. Bending under the burden, she gained a den, the opening of which in the side of the rocks was concealed under the brambles and nettles.

It was Gorgo's home. An old woman with bloody eyes and a livid lip was waiting in the shadows. "Gorgo, you're coming back late," she said reproachfully.

"Let the god with the crocodile's teeth eat them! They took such time with their damn grave ceremonies."

“Is it still a child that you are bringing?”

“No, Mother Bombo, he’s a giant.”

Gorgo bent over the corpse and sucked on the wound. The old woman approached, but her daughter pushed her away, growling like a beast of prey.

Suddenly the dead man rose up and said: “I am better now”.

Hearing him speak, Bombo shrieked and fled to the very back of the cave. The other, less fearful, blocked the entrance of the lair with a wooden panel and lit a torch.

Nemeith recognized her in the light and said: “Beautiful with tawny eyes, may Heimdall wish you well for having healed me; I was suffocating. Give me something to drink.”

Gorgo went to fetch him an amphora, still growling. When he had emptied it, she said to him: “You must rest, look upon my bed as yours.” She insisted, Nemeith consented and let her dress her wound. After thanking her for her good care, he fell fast asleep. Gorgo watched him and ended up sleeping too.

The old woman, recovered from her fright, came back to the light. “Gorgo, you have deceived me: it is your lover whom you have brought home.”

“And if that were, what would you have to say to that?”

“Nothing, provided I have a share in the feast,” replied the old woman, approaching the heap of ferns where Nemeith lay.

Gorgo jumped in her face, and they fought into the shadows with their snapping teeth like two she-wolves. Bombo did not reappear.

The next day, as the girl seemed sad, Nemeith said to her: "If you are sorry to have brought me to your cave, I will go away as soon as I can stand on my feet."

"No, I wish you to stay here a long time, I do not regret having torn you away to Yama, the guardian of the dead."

"Why did you take me from the grave?"

"Can't you guess?" she said, looking into hers. She approached him, looked at him and started biting his shoulder. "Your skin is softer than a peach and fresher than a lime."

"Would you like to eat me?" asked Nemeith, laughing, who did not believe she would.

She did not answer and only wanted to inspect her wound. Nemeith gave himself up to it, unsuspectingly. Carried away by a horrible desire, she then clasped him with superhuman strength and fed on his blood despite the efforts he made to get rid of her. He fainted.

When he regained consciousness, he thought that it was all over with him, so weak did he feel. Gorgo came back in the night and wanted to bite him again. He pushed her away, saying: "I've had enough of your friendship! you are a descendant of those hideous warriors, eaters of human flesh and drinkers of blood, who once ravaged Atlantis, until the day when it was delivered by the valiant Amazons. Your mothers still have fill at night on the blood of the wounded on the battlefields. Gorgo, I know what you are."

"If you thank me for my kindness with insults, I will let you die. It is by sucking your wound that I will heal your wounds."

She restrained herself for a few days, and Nemeith began to think he had been mistaken in his naming of her kind. But, in doubt, he found and stole a long knife and hid it under his bed to defend himself against her. She continued to restrain herself. When he felt his strength had returned, he thanked her and wanted to leave. She persuaded him to wait until the next day.

The first part of that night was calm; but soon Gorgo pretended not to be able to resist her love, and she asked him for kisses. Nemeith rejected her. Then the thirst for blood, more imperious than ever for being denied for days, took possession of her. She pounced on Nemeith and bit him by the throat.

"Gorgo, I'm going to kill you, if you don't let me go." Then she was in such a fury that she took a shred of flesh from him. Nemeith plunged his knife into her chest. She sprang back, roared like a panther, and fell face forward on her bloody couch.

Chapter XXXVII

Nemeith crawled out of the lair and went down to the plain. He felt fine, and in the daylight saw his grievous wounds were almost healed.

At daybreak, as he scaled the nearly deserted city-walls of Sisparis, he heard a tremendous noise ahead and then cries and groans. He ran up and saw his Ziris nearly lost in the air. Nemeith took his rope and climbed again and this time with the speed and agility of a mountain goat. With the help of a projecting stone here, a fragment of a staircase there, he wwas able to reach Ziris. Though the wall, which was leaning more and more, allowed him little time. Deftly he gained the narrow spur of masonry and quickly fixed his rope.

Ziris threw herself on his neck and said: “Shadow of my beloved, I have suffered enough in life, and I am happy to feel myself joined in death with you.”

“Hold on now,” said he, “we may yet live; may Heimdall protect us!” He grabbed the rope, took Ziris in a firm arm, and let himself slide in the opposite direction to the one where the wall was leaning. They reached the ground in the midst of a few stunned spectators who had come up to see the devastation.

His hands and knees were torn and rope-burned; but what did it matter? He has saved the one he loved and could walk away with her.

The final shard of the tower tottered, swayed collapsed with a crash.

“Flee!” cried Ziris, “let us flee from this palace: it is that of Mrytiou, king of the dark depths! Do you hear those howls? They are the black Rackasas, the impure Dewas, the evil Buthas. Look at my black belching mountain yonder: now I know is no longer the the abode of Ptah but of Angramanyu. Let us flee, let us flee!”

“I hear frightful tumult, war-cries, a rustle of arms” he said. And they listened and waited.

It was Hu-gadarn at the head of his Kimris and Nemeith, come to give battle to the Scythians. They were met by a flood of Atlantean warriors, commanded by Satourann himself. The king of kings then rushed in upon the still drunken Scythians, and blood flowed with the wine.

Then a new enemy presents itself. Artemis of the Amazons, seething at her forced retreat, had doubled back with a cadre of hand-picked fighters. She and her warriors mounted the hundred steps and attacked the Atlanteans. The king shouted to his guards to crush the handful of women. The Amazons crowded around their queen and the fight became very terrible. They were overwhelmed; but not one of them tries

to flee. Thus guarded, Arthemis hacked her way to the king and shouted to him: "Satourann! your power is finished", and with her sharp sagaris she split the crown on his head right down through the triple rank of golden horns. The king staggered, his warriors dragged him back into the palace.

She wanted to pursue him, but stopped in shock at the sight of the Golden-haired Rooster, who was using the retreat of the King to try to slip Ziris to safety. The Amazon's fury and jealousy at seeing her rival, her enemy, her slave in Nemeith's arms, outweigh the joy of finding him alive.

She hurls her sagaris at them, and before Nemeith has time to foresee the blow, the blade of the Amazon disappeared deep into the white breast of the Ziris.

"Daughter of evil, you are going to die!" Nemeith cried out to her.

But the earth trembles and opens to give upward passage to a spray of flames. The Amazon and her war-band disappear into the yawning abyss, which closes in on them.

Nemeith seizes Ziris, who is still breathing, and carries her away from the human turmoil and steaming palace floors.

Everything was confusion now, sides and tribes lost in a welter of blood and fire. Two hundred thousand barbarians now see but one aim, to loot and annihilate the great Atlantean city before the volcano consumes it. Blows rain down on all sides; arrows fly, death mows down by the score and corpses pile up and are suddenly swallowed in yawning gulfs of steam. They all strike, split the skulls of any who come near, take off the hair: all are red with blood.

The Atlanteans weakened and appalled, withdraw their forces to the palace keep. Heavy bridges are raised, bright metal doors closed. The

engines of death are uncovered on the high towers. Iron harpoons come down to seize any assailants, and throw them back into the city. Boiling oil and flaming pitch trickle from the top of the most vulnerable walls. Then darts, the javelins, the stones reddened by the fire are thrown at the human ant-hill below, but nothing prevents some from climbing to the palace.

Then Satourann ordered his own house dismantled to be thrown down the walls. The beams, the roofs, the battlements even, were torn off and sliding down they swept off many the barbarians. But nothing helped, still they came. The ditches below were filled with corpses, and still they came. Then gates were broken down and the streams of relentless warriors rushed in, collide and dragging horses, chariots and mammoths into a deep current of blood.

Thunder rumbles, lightning bursts. It seems the very gods want to fight too. In twenty places in the city, the subterranean fires of Ptah open new passages with frightful detonations and hurl rocks that flamed up into the heavens. Whole houses disappeared into chasms that vomited up torrents of boiling water. Wide grounds collapsed to swallow up thousands of combatants and then throw their corpses at another point. The mammoths in madness stumbled into the flames. The earth collapsed under the feet of the fleeing men.

Far up on the highest and almost unreachable watchtowers of the city, the keepers of the flames thought themselves safe from the tumult below. But they trembled as they saw the ocean retreat swiftly back, so far that one could reach Scythia with dry feet.

The frightened crowd from the diminished city have all rushed out onto this immense new beach to flee Sisparis. But they are stalled where the gravel beach met wide sucking mudflats. Then the sea returned with the rapidity of a turning shark, and its mighty surge crushed and buried the unfortunate people under mountains of water.

The palace of the Atlantean kings, with its towers; its terraces, its hanging gardens, its great porphyry staircase, collapses and disappeared in a single block into an ocean now covered with flaming bitumen and sulphur. The hundred-pillars forged by Bolkai melt under the devouring action of fire. They are no more than a faint brilliant furrow, instantly obliterated by rivers of lava. The ancient tamarisk trees, whose branches covered with pink flowers hung from the top of the terraces on the lower floors, offer up only a few blackened coals to be carried away on incandescent waves.

From the volcano gulf flows a foul and burning mud, as the god rejects the virgins with whom King Satourann has gorged him. He spits out his entrails of fire, vomits iron, roars… and the cone gives way under the forces of molten matter. The whole of the temple shakes, rises and bursts. The basalt blocks, the bronze wall, the temple, the temple-maidens , and the priests with shaved heads, who have sought their salvation from the furious god, are thrown into the scalding air.

And as if the burning earth and the boiling sea had not been enough to destroy Atlantis and its inhabitants, the sun disappears, the sky splits, and its cataracts complete the engulfment in darkness.

Where are the treasures of the king of kings? Where are his people, his palace, his city? What has become of his warriors in sonorous armour, his Kuretes, his concubines covered with precious fabrics and fine pearls, his cyclops with powerful hammers? Where are his cataphracts, his sentinels, his allies with swift arrows, with their heavy elephants and light anoplothers?

At the bottom of the ocean.

And the king himself, where was he? Terrified, he fled with nothing but his life, carried away by his swiftest steeds, over the trembling plain. He raced toward the mountains of Our, thinking they are so high that the sea cannot reach them. In his furious course through the dark night he

arrived at the edge of the river Tartarus. He threw his horses into it; but Tartarus, from a slow and peaceful river, had become a torrent that whirls and roars. As he plunged in he realised there was no way to turn and return to shore. The Tartarus rolls his bones forever, and with him died Atlantis!

Chapter XXXVIII

Where are the Rooster and the great love Ziris?

Nemeith had taken Ziris her in his arms and fled at random. Then he seized a stray horse as his own. Passing a stadium on the outskirts of the city, he was joined in chariots by Hu-gadarn and some of his warriors who had recognized him. They were all far away in the plains of Eleuzine, when Ptah overthrew Sisparis. They heard the rolling of lightning and saw great lights behind them.

After gaining the plains, the tired Nemeith was forced to stop and lay the dying Ziris down on grass. The others continued on a little into the plains, then stopped to look back at the distant sky-spectacle.

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She was pale and icy. He leaned over her and his tears fell on the girl's breast. As if the tears of love and pain had a heavenly virtue, Ziris opened her eyes, put her hand to her talisman and said: "O God of the vast gaze! O you the vigilant, you witness of our thoughts, our words and our works, Mithra-Light, MithraSun, keep death away. Let me live for the one I love!"

Then to her friend: "Take me to the land of the Aces. There is a river called Lethe. I have read in the sacred books that its waves erase all human suffering. You will immerse me in it and I will be healed!"

He smiled wanly. Ziris revived and said: “O Nemeith, this is the last day of Atlantis, and it is I who have brought down upon my people the wrath of the gods!”

“Forget your dangerous gods”, said Nemeith. “Heimdall is great, you have not offended him, he will protect you.”

“No,” replied the Ziris, “Ptah will not let go of his prey.” “He struck me, he will strike you too. Twice I have dedicated myself to him. He will pursue me now to death. Abandon me here, since my destiny must be fulfilled!”

But a moment later Ziris pressed against her lover and whispered to him: “The Lethe, the Lethe...”

At last they arrived at the bank of this longed-for river. A thick fog enveloped the earth like a shroud and resolved itself into a warm rain. Ziris was frozen with cold, and this time Nemeith thought she was indeed dead.

“Don’t let me die. Nemeith, push your horse, faster, faster still... How far away is Lethe!”

“Let us get out of this cold,” she said. “Who are you, you who hold me in your arms?”

“Nemeith, your friend. Here you are.” He threw himself into the waters of Lethe with his horse and plunged Ziris into it three times. She drank the beneficent wave, breathed, opened her eyes, and spoke. “Life. Mithras is powerful. Thanks to Mithras!” Then she seemed to sleep.

Nemeith saw a glowing figure on the opposite shore, who motioned him to take Ziris under a nearby cedar tree near where the water flowed through black roots. Nemeith obeyed him.

She woke then. “What is this country? Where are the men? Who am I?”

“Ziris, don’t you remember the Amazon who struck you in battle?” You would have died if I had not brought you to Lethe. Have you lost your memory?

And amid the noise of the rain that was still falling, slow, incessant, on the sodden earth outside the shelter of the tree, Nemeith knelt before her and tried to awaken her memories. She listened to him and looked at him in amazement.

“How do you expect me to remember what you are talking about? I hardly understand you; I have just been born. You are beautiful and I love you; that is all I know.”

“Heimdall has sent a kind madness to her,” cried Nemeith, laughing.

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Hu-gadarn shook Nemeith to wake him from his dream of Lethe.

“Rooster,” said he, “take courage and get up, and let us go; the plain is covering with water and the light is poor. The day is extinguished in clouds of ash.

He re-seated Ziris on his horse, and they all rode away in the direction of the mountains of Scythia. Even though they went far away, the flat land diluted by the rain soon became impassable. The horses sank into an ever-deeper mire. Exhausted with fatigue, they could not fight against the mud currents that soon carry them along with the rocks, the meadows and the forests. One rider sank, then four, then twenty.

Hu-gadarn cried out: “Nemeith! if you see our steppes again, make my son a warrior.” And he disappeared.

Nemeith felt his horse engulfed. He seized Ziris, he swam and cut through the incoming pitiless waves. They were alone and floating in the middle of a joyless ocean. He struggled to the floating corpse of a mammoth, clings to it and there caught his breath. Soon the mammoth begins to sink. The sky poured down mountains of water. Nemeith began swimming again; but felt his strength betraying him; he struggled in despair. A long beam of wood passed by him, he clings to it and holds Ziris onto it. He bumps into a corpse, that of Herser.

Then the torrents carry him away to a broken tree trunk all covered with hair; it is the war tree of the camp of Arthemis. He hooks onto it by means of branches and shreds of his clothes, and climbs into the branches, hauling Ziris with him. The night came, long and cruel. Ziris snuggled up to him; he forgets the danger and tries to warm her a little. Yet the rain, which the day before had fallen in drops larger than a thumb, was now falling in drops larger than a bull's eye. The cold pierced them with its arrows. The Ziris seemed asleep, however.

Hunger made itself felt, imperious, all devouring. There was none on this tree-raft.

The rain ceased and a thick fog succeeded it. Some fish came nuzzling around the branches. Nemeith tore off an arrowhead from the bark of the tree, broke off a branch and made a fish-spear out of it; he harpooned a fish, and, beaming with joy, cried out: "We will not die of hunger today!"

The next day, a group of spouting whales barred their way and threatened to swallow them up or overturn them. Nemeith looked for his flint axe at his side; it was still in his grave under the ruins of Atlantis.

"O God Father," he said, "when shall I fashion a new weapon in my own mountains?"

For three days they were the plaything of the waves, and they saw no land. "Perhaps there is no more land?" Nemeith said in despair. Ziris wept at the thought.

Then a ship passed in the distance; it was as high as a palace: he recognized the ark of Xizouthros. He called out, but the floating house of animals disappeared in the fogs.

"Men abandon us. But perhaps their One God will hear us?". And they spoke to the one God as they would to a friend.

Six days more, and Nemeith, ready to faint for lack of water, remembered the talisman that Ziris wore and asked: "What's in this golden bag?"

She didn't remember. He, with his fish-spear, split the envelope of Bahavani's talisman and found nothing inside it; but at that very moment a ray of sunshine pierced the clouds and warmed the couple lost in waves. A rainbow appeared in the clouds. "This will soon be over," said Nemeith, "your Sun-god makes a covenant with the waves."

Seaweed, herbs, and fruits floated around them now: a dove came and alighted on the shoulder of the Ziris. Nemeith wanted to eat the bird, but she prevented him.

One morning some dolphins came to play nearby; seagulls brushed the foaming tips of the waves with their white wings; the breeze brought the scent of earthy verdure, and in the evening, in the fires of the setting sun, the violet crest of a mountain appeared.

"Land!" cried the two lovers. And they embraced each other, weeping with joy.

They helped each other with their hands by way of oars to steer themselves; but this land was still so far away that it took all night to reach the land.

The morning light showed them green hills, the first steps of a chain of mountains whose snowy tops were lost in the clouds; sodden forests, meadows, torrents roaring down to the bottom of the flooded valleys; herds of wild oxen and fallow deer grazing in the higher grasslands, gazelles leaping on the rocks.

Nemeith pushed to the shore, where the wood broke on rocks on the surface of the water; a large wave took them and threw them up on the pebbled shore, then another came and threatened to take them back. They escaped and went higher, eagerly sucked the abundant fresh rainwater from pebbled pools in the rocks, and then ran to the top of the mountain to spy the land.

The young warrior plucked a small plant, and giving it to his friend said: "It is a flower of our mountains of Kaf; we are in Scythia".

Ziris threw herself on her knees and said: "Which god do I have to thank, Nemeith? Are you not a god yourself, and am I not one too? Whom shall we worship now?"

Nemeith was silent and did not dare to remind her of the anger of Ptah, nor the oaths from which the mysterious healing dream of the river Lethe and Mithras had at last loosed her.

The waters fell. He had soon hewn a new axe of stone, a hut of branches was built lower down the mountain, a deer felled. After supper, at the rising of the moon, the two lovers retired under the same roof.

Ziris still remembered the past confusedly, and said to Nemeith, "Have I dreamed that I was a great princess, and that a vast people worshipped me as a deity?"

“If this were so, what would change now?”

“I also dreamed I suffered much for your sake, and that I asked my fierce gods to live with you in the depths of the forests; but they cursed and persecuted me. I no longer know them.”

A year later, when the older warriors of Nemeith and those few who had escaped the fires of Ptah had joined their leader in the mountains, two beautiful twins with golden hair were born in front of the hut of foliage, under the tall trees of the forest.

Nemeith adopted the young Dhulmenar, son of Hu-gadarn, and brought him up with his people, and his own two sons became great chiefs. They set out to tame and fill the land. They were called Hampeiou and Heth, whose memory the Greeks have preserved under the names of Amphion and Zethus.

Ziris, who from her childhood had read in the sacred books, gradually recovered memory of the events; yet all the deity mysteries of the temple were forever veiled from her, and Mithras and the one God were those that she transmitted to posterity. With the help of Bolkai, who had escaped the disasters and had come to join her, she taught her sons the arts of civilization. While Nemeith destroyed the monsters spewed out by the flood, Amphion built a city of white stones, which was Ataba or Thebes, the mother city. Zethus found in the grass the remains of the old world and rebuilt the city of Asgard, over which Arhimaz had reigned, on piled mounds and islands amid the flooded land of Ur.

THE END.